

THE MINISTRY OF DELIVERANCE IN THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

by

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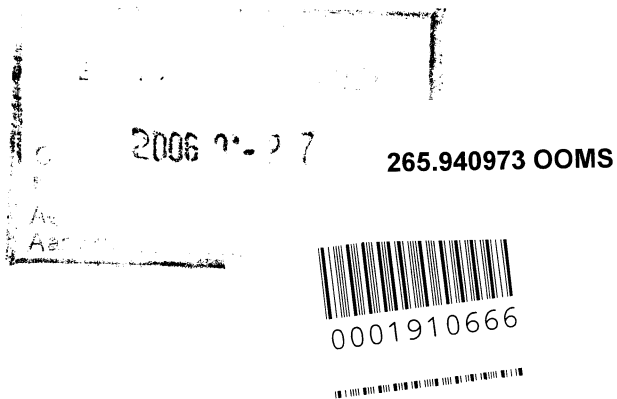
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I declare that *The Ministry of Deliverance in the Reformed Church in America* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Summary

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This dissertation lays out some of the current attitudes and understandings in the Reformed Church in America in regards to the ministry of deliverance. The arguments laid out are supported by what is currently happening in deliverance ministry across the United States and in-depth interviews with Reformed Church in America pastors. Differences in how we understand the terminology involved in this ministry were also briefly looked at. Deliverance ministry within the Reformed church is hampered by issues of fear and uncertainty, lack of knowledge or understanding and issues of worldview. Many RCA pastors are open to this ministry although very few have actually engaged in deliverance with a person. RCA pastors tend to lean more toward psychological answers than they do spiritual ones.

Keywords

Reformed Church in America, Deliverance Ministry, Fear, Demonic, Worldview, Qualitative Research, United States, RCA, Exorcism, Possession

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research Problem

“And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to perform healing” (Luke 9:1-2 NASB). This was Jesus’ first transfer of authority as recorded. Then later, just before He was to ascend into heaven, Christ gave His disciples what we call The Great Commission. He said in Matthew 28:18-20, “. . . , “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”(emphasis mine). And so began the greatest ‘reformation’ of all times! Jesus very clearly called His disciples to, as part of their ongoing ministry, the ministry of deliverance or exorcism. As the present day disciples of Jesus Christ, we also are called to exercise and have as part of our ministries, the ministry of deliverance.

The question therefore, that I am seeking to answer is this: Why, in our day and age, coming from a Reformed tradition of *sola scriptura*, are we reluctant to engage in a ministry of which some would say comprised 25% of Jesus’ earthly ministry? To put it another way, why do we apparently see so little of the ministry of deliverance or exorcism going on in Reformed circles today? Did not the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Corinth say, “I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me” (1 Cor. 4:16). Paul says this from a very Jewish understanding of what it meant to be a disciple or ‘*talmid*’. The goal of a Jewish ‘*talmid*’ was not so much to know what his Rabbi knew, although that was important, but his greatest goal, his deepest desire was to ‘BE’ who the Rabbi was!¹ So Paul wasn’t so much telling the hearers of his letters to imitate him so much as it was to follow his example as he followed Christ’s (see 1 Cor. 11:1 where Paul states this clearly). Part of the ministry of Paul and the early disciples ‘*Meshiah*’ was to at times, openly take on the powers of darkness. This ministry has taken place throughout Christian history and on down to today in some circles. Let’s take a brief

¹ This comes from an extensive teaching by Dr. Ray Vander Laan called, “The Dust of the Rabbi” taught at Mars Hill Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. See also his website at www.followtherabbi.com

look historically at how the ministry of deliverance has evolved, starting with the 14th century onward.

With the advent of the 14th century, the world was once again going through the birth pangs of another ‘reformation’, this time in the very church that Christ had founded, that is the Christian church as it was known at the time in the West, the Roman Catholic Church. While not going into depth here, the Reformation as we know it today was influenced mainly by two key individuals, Martin Luther and John Calvin. While Luther’s deep desire for reformation grew out of a deeply religious experience, Calvin’s desire for reformation grew out of his highly trained, “. . . intellectual, clear, logical mind” (Latourette, 1953: 759). The impact of intellectualism on Calvin may in part be responsible for him writing very little about the ministry of exorcism in his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Repr. 1949) as this is no doubt a more ‘experiential’ part of the Christian faith than an intellectual part. Calvin does mention the ministry of exorcism, but only in several oblique references. In his *Institutes* I.VIII.XXII, Calvin, in speaking of the third commandment, notes that, “. . . there is still more evil in its [the Divine Name] being employed for nefarious purposes, as is done by those who use it in necromancy, cursing, illicit exorcisms, and other impious incantations.” At this point, Calvin only mentions ‘illicit exorcisms’ without going further into what a valid exorcism is or how the Name of God would be used in such instances. In IV.XV.IX Calvin notes the addition of exorcism to the rite of baptism. He is pleading here for a return to the simplicity of baptism by water alone without the addition of other rites. Here he notes that the addition of exorcism to the rite of baptism may actually have been a device of Satan, “to the open disgrace of baptism, . . .” Again in his *Institutes* IV.XV.XLIII, Calvin briefly mentions the ministry of exorcism in relation to baptism as something that was added in antiquity but should be done away with. Finally, in Calvin’s *Institutes* IV.IX.XXIV he is elaborating on the different offices within the Roman Catholic Church and how these offices have at best been corrupted and are of no value at all. In referring to the office of an exorcist, Calvin notes that, “they cannot persuade demons that they are endued with such power, not only because demons do not submit to their orders, but even command themselves. Scarcely will you find one in ten who is not possessed by a wicked spirit.” It would seem that Calvin does not have much use for the ministry of exorcism as for him at least; this ministry had been so severely corrupted during his time that he does not spend any time at all in trying to redeem it.

From the Middle Ages on, exorcism has been a part, albeit not necessarily a prominent one, of the life of people and the church. Latourette (1975: 535) describes how, “To Christians of that age [Middle Ages] the unseen world of spirits was very real. The Devil and his hosts were believed to be the source of many and perhaps most of the ills which beset the human race.” While Latourette is not specifically mentioning the ministry of exorcism, he is describing a worldview, a way of looking at life that clearly included the supernatural. During that time, and even up to today, the Catholic Church had a liturgy for the rite of exorcism. The classic text on that subject is the *Rituale Romanum* (1614, 1952). The *Rituale Romanum* not so much laid out a clear, step by step liturgy, as it laid out what the priest needed to discern before engaging in an exorcism, how to prepare oneself as a priest for the exorcism, what signs to look for in determining if an exorcism was really needed and finally, the approval of the presiding bishop to proceed with the exorcism. Some of the language was changed when the *Rituale Romanum* was reprinted in 1952, yet interestingly, the language that was changed was made to better reflect gains in the areas of psychology and science. So even in this document, one is able to discern the influence of our modern, scientific, rationalistic worldview on how the Catholic Church viewed this ministry.

Lovelace (1976: 80) notes that, “The Reformation . . . launched a biblical attack on magical elements in contemporary Christian practice, and on the occult world outside the church, which began to restrain the world of superstition.” I find it interesting that while the world of ‘superstition’ was restrained, the exact opposite began to happen in the church. While the church and the Reformers were busy attacking superstition, the understanding of the supernatural within the church no doubt also began to be diminished. This had the effect of having any belief in almost anything supernatural, whether God or Satan or angels or demons, would open one to scorn or worse.

With the rise of modernity, there was still evidence that the ministry of exorcism was a needed ministry in the life of the church. In Zuendel’s (1999) biography of Johann Christoph Blumhardt, he describes Blumhardt’s struggles against demonic powers in the village of Möttlingen, Germany from 1841-1843. Even during that time, there was a growing sense that talk of demons, angels and the like was a leftover of sorts from a previous age. Speaking of Blumhardt’s faith from the preface of the *Awakening* (1999), the editors note, “This faith embarrassed Blumhardt’s contemporaries, so much so that his nervous superiors tried to suppress him by restricting his pastoral work.” The editors rightly note going on, “It is even

more suspect in our time, when scientific progress has rendered rationalism the only acceptable faith for thinking people, and the untidy mysteries of the supernatural are relegated to talk shows and fiction shelves. Mention God, or Satan, and you're sure to evoke wincing or worse." From that time forward, it would appear that exorcism fell further into disrepute as our Western culture moved more and more into the 'modern' age of rationalism and scientific realism. From the Reformation on then, during the age of Enlightenment, have we actually become dulled to the supernatural?

C.S. Lewis, writing during the height of modernity in the mid 20th century, is noted as saying that, "the devil is equally pleased when he is feared and when he is ignored" (in Montgomery, et al. 1976: 21). During Lewis' time, spiritualism and the occult were on the rise. In 1951 Britain repealed the Witch Act and witchcraft and the occult began to operate more openly than ever before. Within the church during this time, there was still a vast ignorance, read 'ignoring', of the forces of evil on the loose within our culture. Lovelace (1976: 80) notes that by the, ". . . late 1960's the media were presenting so much evidence of a witchcraft revival that this kind of scholarly ignorance became increasingly difficult." With the turn of the decade into the 70's, the U.S. was in an upheaval. There was the reaction, sometimes violent, against the Vietnam War. There were presidential scandals and throughout much of the Christian church, there was silence in regards to what was happening concerning spiritual warfare and what was really happening in terms of the spiritual realm.

During the late 60's and early 70's, especially in more conservative, evangelical circles, the ministry of exorcism had virtually disappeared. In the 60's and early 70's, two things I believe began to cause a shift in attitude toward this ministry of the church. First, the release of Don Basham's book, *Deliver Us From Evil* (1972) which recounted his struggle against the demonic during the 1960's, raised the issue from a pastoral standpoint. Coupled with this was the rise of Derek Prince's ministry and his defense of a Christian being able to 'have' a demon. This caused some great upheavals within the Pentecostal / Charismatic circles. As Cuneo (2001: 96) states though, "At the end of the 1960's deliverance was still very much a guerrilla operation within the charismatic renewal movement . . ." These changes within the church as a whole began mainly due to the ministry of Basham and Prince as already noted and in the early 70's due to the ministry of a Dominican priest named Francis MacNutt. MacNutt was able to articulate coherently to the church as a whole what this ministry of deliverance was all about. MacNutt's ministry initially was simply (can we use that word?) a healing ministry, yet he soon

realized that you can't have a healing ministry without sooner or later running into the demonic. MacNutt was influenced by Basham and Prince yet MacNutt himself says, ". . . the biggest influence was experience. When you're praying for healing often enough, you inevitably come into contact with evil spirits. These spirits come out of people – bizarre, ugly manifestations. This stuff gets your attention. . ." (in Cuneo, 2001: 98). MacNutt later wrote what many would now consider a classic, well laid out argument for the ministry of exorcism in *Deliverance from Evil Spirits* (1995).

While these men's ministries were beginning to cause ripples within Pentecostal / Charismatic and Catholic circles, another factor came into play that may actually have served to influence the more conservative, evangelical church more directly. This factor in a nutshell was Hollywood! With the release of William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* back in 1973, the interest in the area of exorcism or deliverance has skyrocketed in the general public but also within Christian circles. Cuneo (2001: 10) notes that, "Behind all the grotesquerie and gruesome special effects, [of *The Exorcist*] however, Blatty's theological message played loud and clear. As much as contemporary men and women might want to deny it, there was still a force of supernatural evil active in the world, and both science and reason were powerless against it." Father Tom Bermingham, who gave some technical assistance to Blatty during the filming of *The Exorcist*, noted that the movie, being strange as it was, was nothing like the aftermath. He said to Cuneo (2001: 12) during an interview that, ". . . I found myself on the hot seat. . . dozens of people were trying to contact me every week. And they weren't all Catholics. Some were Jewish, some Protestant, . . and they all believed that they themselves or someone close to them might be demonically possessed. These were truly desperate people. . ." Cuneo goes on to detail the trail of how demons came to be 'popular' in American culture.

From Malachi Martin's *Hostage to the Devil*, (1992) to a number of underground exorcists, to Hollywood continually picking up on what popular culture wanted to see, the subject of, or some may say, the ghost of deliverance and exorcism was once again, after centuries of lying dormant, being resurrected front and center for American Christianity. From this came the reports of Satanic Ritual Abuse, of satanic rituals using infants and small animals as sacrifices and the American public began to see demons everywhere. A number of books about deliverance were written and the ministry began to gain the attention of the more conservative, evangelical wing of the Church. Hollywood churned out everything from the

comic *Ghostbusters* to *The Amityville Horror* which was inspired by a haunted house in Amityville, Long Island, New York.

It took the church a while to catch up, as it seems is usual! Once the topic was back on the table, so to speak, it began to be debated, discussed and dissected. Another impetus to moving this subject into the forefront of evangelicalism was a class taught at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA. Dr. C. Peter Wagner and Dr. Charles Kraft had invited John Wimber to come and teach in a class they were teaching called “Signs, Wonders and Church Growth”. Wimber talked about ‘doing the stuff’ that Jesus did, mainly healing and setting people free of the demonic. The class soon became the most popular on campus. However, this was much to the chagrin of some of the more conservative faculty who saw what was happening as, “. . . promoting a fanatical and magicalized kind of Christianity” (Cuneo, 2001: 202). The class was taught for several years before it was cancelled and later sanitized by the administration. When I attended Fuller, the course had been renamed to ‘Healing and World Evangelization’. With Fuller being known as a conservative, biblical, Calvinistic, evangelical seminary, this helped propel the subject of healing and deliverance once again into the mainstream of evangelical thought.

All of the above helped to bring an awareness that we as believers need to be aware of such things as exorcism, spiritual warfare and the reality of the supernatural. Mainstream evangelicalism is learning that these are areas we need to be able to grapple and deal with on a more effective basis.

There is another factor helping in another way to, at least through the backdoor to push this topic forward. During the 1980’s and on into today’s world, we have seen the rise of the influence of psychology and therapy as means of helping people to be able to cope with life. Go to any bookstore in the country today and the ‘self-help’ section will be plentifully stocked with everything from A to Z! Fuller Seminary even has a School of Psychology in which students are taught how to apply and use what we know of psychology in a Christian setting. In some ways, the rise of our therapeutic culture has served to advance the ministry of exorcism as well. Many live life today, in our self-help culture, with the understanding that they are not responsible for how they act or respond to life. After all, it’s the environment or our bringing up, our potty training or it’s simply genetics that make me the way I am. With that as a backdrop, it is easy to see how someone could easily latch on to the adage that it’s not my fault,

it's the devil that made me do it as actor Flip Wilson used to say! If we can blame the demonic, then ultimately I'm not responsible for how I act, for my anger, temper, addictions or whatever else ails me!

Moving from a bit of history to the present, let's take a look at how the discipline of Practical Theology relates to this area of deliverance ministry. Practical Theology has a long history in itself but that is not the focus here. Suffice it to say that Practical Theology's foci has been how do we take the doctrines of the church and put flesh on them, how do we make our faith 'real' and if a part of our faith is not relevant, not being fleshed out in the real world, how do we go about discovering what is going on through study and bringing a relevant solution that is coherent with our faith.

There are many different approaches that Practical Theology can take to an issue such as the confessional, contextual, correlative, hermeneutical, liberation, empirical-analytical or even a feminist approach. As one can see, it is necessary to understand and approach a situation with a certain view in mind as far as Practical Theology goes. This simply helps give a clearer definition to how you approach the subject area to be studied. I will be concentrating on these a bit more in the next chapter, but for now, I will be approaching this topic of deliverance ministry from a confessional/contextual approach. In a nutshell, these approaches seek to approach a subject from a viewpoint of what does Scripture say to this issue and what is actually happening in our unique contextual situation. With those in mind, how can we bring a biblical solution to a unique situation starting from Scripture but not putting blinders on to what is happening in the world around us.

The challenge then is to use the tools that we have such as what history can teach us, the tools and insights that psychology can offer us, and the tools that Practical Theology offers which can help us as the Reformed Church in America work toward a more biblically balanced way of viewing and dealing with the issue of the ministry of deliverance. As Reformed Christians, we also need to stand on the truth of the Word of God that there are spiritual realities, that there is an enemy who. “. . . prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pt. 5:8b NASB). With the current secular interest in the spiritual realm as well as the rise in interest within evangelical circles, I want to examine how Pastors within the Reformed Church in America view the ministry of deliverance.

As a brief side note, my own introduction to the arena is one I cannot precisely nail down. I've only seen 'Ghostbuster's' as a movie, none of the other more sensational haunted or 'deliverance' type movies (e.g., *The Exorcist*). I've read a number of books over the years such as Don Basham's *Deliver Us From Evil* (1972) and others which dealt with spiritual warfare issues and the like. I've attended C. Peter Wagner's class at Fuller Seminary entitled 'Healing and World Evangelization' which dealt with issues of healing and deliverance. This is all to say that not having attended an RCA seminary and always trying to be willing to look and investigate what's 'outside the box' I've come to a place that it appears very few Reformed Church in America pastors are at.

The question that seems to present itself is this: Can we as Calvinist's, stand squarely on the Scriptures while ministering grace and compassion to people who may be afflicted or tormented by either the demonic or mental diseases? Can we have a biblical view of the realities of the supernatural and the ministry of deliverance while incorporating what psychology has taught us? I believe the answer is a resounding, YES! How we do that is and may always be a challenge but as believers who hold that, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable. . ." (2 Tim. 3:16 NASB) while also believing that God works through the gifts of His people who have insights into psychology, medicine and other related disciplines.

With that as some preliminary background, to set the stage, let me proceed with giving some direction on where I plan to go in dealing with this subject as it presents itself. To attempt to gain a perspective on what this ministry of exorcism or deliverance is, I want to look at several different areas. First, chapter 2 will deal with what is the relationship of 'deliverance ministry' to the discipline of Practical Theology? Is this a part of Practical Theology or does the discipline of Practical Theology have any thoughts or contributions that can help us as Reformed people? What approach to Practical Theology should we take or is one more conducive to Reformed theology than another?

In Chapter 3 I want to look at the language and terms we use when discussing this topic as they are often confused and confusing. When one begins to study and read the literature available on the subject of deliverance, you will find very early on that there can be wide disagreements on what the terms mean and how to best apply them to certain situations. The issue of terminology is especially relevant to Reformed people as we, as part of the larger

church, like to have our terminology very precise. We, as a rule, don't like to have ambiguities in our theological language.

In chapter 4, I will take a look at what is currently happening in the area of deliverance ministry in the broader context of the 'Church'². By this I will be referring specifically to non-RCA ministries. This discussion will help lay a foundation for this ministry by showing this isn't just some sort of 'fringe' element that seeks to operate in this arena. While there is no doubt a broad spectrum of people and ministries operating in this area, it is by no means limited to those who are outside of Reformed doctrine. I will by no means be covering all that is happening out there in this area. However, we will, I believe, discover that to not know or be aware of what is happening in this area is neither an excuse nor an option for those of us who are in ministry in today's culture.

Chapter 5 will concentrate on the research background. I will take a look at the how the research was conducted and what decisions went into the type of research that was done. The challenges of quantitative versus qualitative research and why I chose qualitative will be considered.

What was discovered during the research process will be the subject of the Chapter 6. I have broken the research findings down into various sub-categories such as how pastors understood deliverance intellectually, theologically, experientially, etc.. This chapter will delve into trying to discern from the surveys that were conducted, the reasons behind why an RCA pastor would or would not be engaged in such a ministry. We will find, I believe, some interesting responses from the surveys and some interesting insights from what the pastors said.

Chapter 7 will attempt to draw some conclusions from the research. I will take a look at what the research discovered or uncovered. The conclusions that are drawn here will be tentative but I believe the research supports them and can give us some indicators on where to go next in the arena.

Finally, I will attempt to look forward, asking where we go from here in terms of the Reformed Church in America and the ministry of deliverance. Is there a way to move this ministry forward, to advance it's use within the context of Reformed theology, of Reformed

² When I refer to the 'Church' I am referring to the universal Christian church or as the Apostles Creed says, the 'holy, catholic church'.

praxis so that those who are sitting in the pews can know there is hope, that this Good News is relevant for today and that they experience this ministry as an act of grace and love? I believe these are all possible and in order to be more fully obedient to our Lord's commands, we should endeavor to see what the Holy Spirit is doing in our day and in our culture in the area of deliverance so that the Kingdom of God may more fully come.

Chapter 2

Deliverance Ministry in Relation to Practical Theology

Don Browning (1985: 15) defines not so much Practical Theology as a discipline but rather, what it must do and be about by saying that, “. . . it must actually do theology and it should do it in such a way as to illuminate Christian practice in relation to life’s concrete problems and issues.” One of the very ‘concrete’ problems that many Christians deal with in their lives is the affliction and harassment by demonic spirits. Therefore, part of Practical Theology’s job is to take what we believe as evangelical Christians and bring it to bear on helping those within our churches who struggle in this area.

Using the language of the Netherlands, where Practical Theology is referred to as ‘diaconology’, Wolfaardt (1985: 56) says that those who are involved in these subjects, “. . . should . . . apply themselves to the study of Scripture, the history and dogmas of the church to enable them to understand exactly what the diakonia of the church entails and to facilitate the better understanding and realization by all people, of the biblical message.” Is that not the job of those who find themselves involved in the ministry of deliverance? Is it not to have a clear understanding of the biblical message in regards to the supernatural, one’s authority in Christ, the sovereignty of God in the spiritual realms? Should not the person involved in deliverance ministry have a clear sense of church history as it relates to this ministry? Does not the study of Scripture and history help us to ‘facilitate the better understanding . . . of the biblical message?’ Practical Theology can therefore be an avenue of bringing hope to people who may be trapped or simply deeply struggling, not knowing what the Word of God has to say and bring to bear on their particular situation.

Practical Theology has been categorized in many different ways. One way of grouping the different ways of approaching Practical Theology is: the confessional, the correlative and the contextual (Wolfaardt, 1993: 2). In reviewing these different approaches, I will be using a middle ground or combination of the confessional and the contextual approaches. The confessional approach seeks to look at Scripture from a position of humility that we are under the Word of God, not over and above it. We need to approach Scripture with an understanding that we do not know all there is to know about the supernatural or the spiritual realm especially as it relates to our subject matter of deliverance or exorcism. As Dr. Victor Matthews, who

used to teach at Cornerstone University, formerly Grand Rapids Baptist College, once remarked in referring to the ministry of deliverance, “The longer I’m in this ministry, the less I’m sure of” (n.d. pers. Comm.). What he was trying to say is that at best, Scripture and our experience give us hints of the supernatural and spiritual realities, yet it is often hard to be dogmatic about the inner workings of angels or demons.

A. G. Van Wyk (1995: 88) notes four characteristics of the ‘Dutch-Reformed’ or confessional approach to Practical Theology. His second characteristic is that, “Guidelines for the service of the church are deductively derived from a theological theory based on Reformed theology.” While I agree that this is part of the confessional approach, it also appears to be part of the source of the problem. The problem being, to state it another way is, why is the Reformed Church in America, standing on a tradition of *sola scriptura*, apparently so reluctant to engage in the ministry of deliverance which Jesus so clearly did and commissioned His disciples to do? The appearance of being an ‘evangelical’ and yet not being willing to do what Jesus commands does, at the least, bring up some serious questions for us as Reformed believers. It was interesting to note at this point that those RCA Pastors who have been involved in a deliverance ministry or are at least aware and approve of it, approach the ministry from a thoroughly Scriptural standpoint.

The contextual approach seeks to, “. . . enable the message of the gospel to be heard, understood and experienced today as the liberating power of God in our historical time” (Wolfaardt, 1993: 2). In a nutshell, the contextual approach seeks to take what Scripture has said and then appropriate these truths in ways that people are able to understand and know the very real difference that the power of the gospel can make in their lives. Van Wyk (1995: 88), quoting Burger’s characteristics of a contextual approach, lists the first characteristic as, “The context and situational analysis of praxis is important.” Taking the situation into account cannot be left behind if one starts from a confessional approach. Jesus often used the situations at hand to bring about new insight and new teaching. Thus, we must be willing to not only take a serious look at what Scripture says to us and be willing to align ourselves with that, we must also be willing to take the situations into which we find ourselves and ask what does Scripture say and speak into this context.

Relying too much or leaning too heavily toward a simply confessional approach tends toward dogmatism and legalism. We can easily get sidetracked into arenas which more

properly are the realm of systematic theology than of Practical Theology. On the opposite side, if we lean too heavily on a simply contextual approach, the authority of Scripture will tend to suffer and the role of man and experience will begin to trump what Scripture has to say. This is a danger not only in this realm but in many of the complex issues which face the church today. With all that said, I still want to come down on the side of the confessional approach, being willing to live with a degree of uncertainty and not necessarily having all one's questions being answered simply by turning to the Bible.

Deliverance ministry then, as it relates to Practical Theology, will attempt to cogently and correctly understand what the Word has to say in regards to this area and then to take that and put it into effect in places where people are struggling to make sense of their lives. To put it another way, Practical Theology will hopefully help inform us in this crucial area as to how to take our theology in several different arenas such as demonology, angelology, Christology, pneumatology and put that theology into effect in bringing hope, healing and release into the lives of people both within and outside the church. Using the tools that Practical Theology has to offer; the research, seeking to understand why we do, or don't do what Scripture teaches and how to best bring about the change necessary to see us as the people of God more closely conforming to the Word of God, we may as Reformed Christians seek to better live out the principles of *sola scriptura* and *semper reformada*.

Chapter 3

Language and Terminology

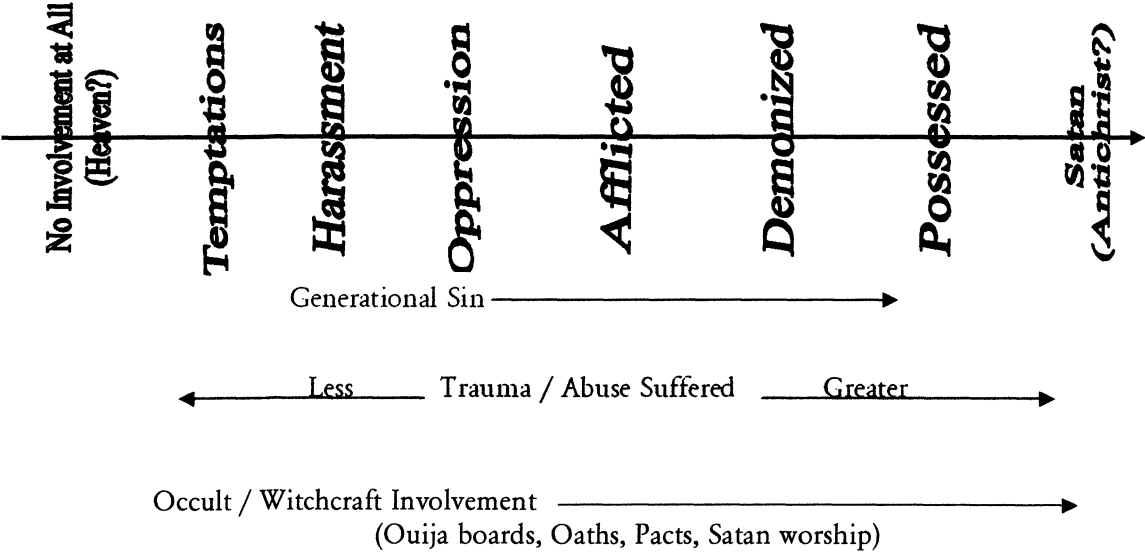
The area of deliverance ministry has caused many long discussion and debates over the years in terms of what is meant and not meant when this topic comes up for discussion. Language is important and therefore it is necessary, at least for the sake of this paper, to have a definition of some of the terms. Nigel Wright deals very well with the subjectivity of our language and the limits of the language which we use when trying to get a grasp on this topic of evil. Wright (1990: 28) even goes so far as to say, which I tend to agree with him, “The use of personal language about the devil is problematic. It personalizes the devil and therefore gives a dignity to him which he does not deserve. To refer to the devil as ‘he’ or ‘him’ confers upon the devil a form of language which strictly speaking refers to persons who are made in the image of God.” Wright rightly recognizes that whenever we give a label or personalize something which we can’t quite understand or wrap our minds around; we tend to give it credence and therefore a sense of justification for existence. The language we use, and how we use it is of great importance, especially concerning this topic. The challenge is that the topic, the evil of which we are dealing with is as Wright says, “. . . inherently deceptive” (1990: 26). With this in mind, we must as Wright notes, have, “. . . our perspective clear and keep the power of darkness in its place” (1990: 27).

When one begins reading the vast literature that is available on this subject, you will invariably run into the various ways of describing what is happening. Terms such as ‘harassment’, ‘oppression’, ‘infestation’, ‘possessed’, ‘possession’, ‘afflicted’, ‘demonized’, ‘deliverance’, ‘exorcism’, ‘casting out’, ‘cleansing’, or others are just some of the many terms that come up when discussing this topic. One will also run into various terms on how to describe the beings one deals with when discussing this area. There are ‘unclean spirits,’ ‘demons’, ‘fallen angels’, ‘mental diseases’, or a whole host of names for the various hierarchies or of the demons themselves. For example, some of the terms are commonly held to be only used when referring to evil spirits when in fact that does not necessarily hold true. While teaching a course on prayer at an RCA (Reformed Church in America) church, the question came up about deliverance ministry and immediately the question came up, “Can a Christian be possessed”? I said, “Absolutely”. In fact, I informed the person who asked the question that she was ‘possessed!’ She gave me that look, *‘I hope you have more to say!’* I

then went on to say, that as believers, we are all ‘possessed’ *by the person of the Holy Spirit!* This of course brought great relief, but the point was made that the terms we use can and often do have double meanings. The challenge therefore, is to at least tentatively offer some definitions of what is meant by the terms as I intend to use them in the course of this paper. Taking the terms in somewhat of an order, that is working on a continuum of sorts from the least involvement of the demonic to the greatest involvement. By the least, I mean the amount of demonic influence upon a person’s life to the greatest, where a person’s life is taken over or their will is completely ‘submerged’ due to the pervasive influence of the demonic in their life.

I put the following chart together, purely as a way of helping to guide our discussion at this point. My brief experience in deliverance ministry and through the reading of books by others with much more experience in this area seems to give some credence to the following chart. While I recognize these neither are scientific categories nor are the concepts true for everyone, I do believe the chart does hold true for the vast majority of those who struggle with the demonic.

Levels or Degrees and Causes of Demonic Involvement



The chart lists how the involvement of an individual, by their own free choice in the various different areas of the occult, can lead to more and more demonic involvement in one’s life. We can also see that while not everyone who suffers or has suffered trauma or abuse in their life struggles with demonic involvement, many do. Usually, the greater the trauma, the

greater the abuse, the more likely there is to be a greater involvement of the demonic in that person's life. Many, if not most of the time in this category, the person themselves had very little if any 'choice' in what happened. Therefore, we can see that demonic involvement can be directly related to the choices a person makes but the inverse is also true, that demonic involvement may have everything to do with 'non-choices' a person has made due to trauma or abuse. Another area that we could look at is the whole area of generational demonic involvement that comes down family lines. There is some debate on this issue and this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. At this point, we could delve into the area of 'legal rights' and some of the different ways the demonic can enter a person. For a fuller discussion of this vital area, see Charles Kraft's book *Defeating Dark Angels* (1992). Suffice it to say at this point that most deliverance ministries will openly deal with generational issues as they come up in terms of the demonic following family lines and family sins. In terms of the above chart, there could be much more research done to substantiate the different parts of the chart, so let's just use it for now as a jumping off point in our discussion and not necessarily as a scientific tool.

Let's start with the term 'temptation', and then move to harassment, oppression, afflicted, demonized, and finally possessed. Many authors will use some of these terms interchangeably. The ones which there are no doubt the most agreement would probably only be the first, temptation. The last term possession also carries a lot of 'baggage' in terms of the discussion that often rages on whether a Christian can or cannot be 'possessed' by the demonic. It is not within the scope of this paper to dive into that discussion, but I would say for the sake of clarity, that I do not believe a born again believer can be 'possessed' in terms of the demonic having control of the person's spirit. This is not to say that that same person cannot be demonized or heavily afflicted with and by the demonic in their soul (mind, will, & emotions). With that, let's take the terms one at a time and try to come up with a working definition for each.

Temptation

The Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary (1988: 1191) defines the word tempt as, 'to entice to commit an unwise or immoral act, especially by a promise of reward.' The term, as it is commonly used, does not necessarily confer demonic as the source behind the 'temptation' that is mostly determined by the particular usage, although some would see all temptation as the 'work of the devil'. The Greek word for temptation is 'πειρασὸς.' In a general

sense, the word means “to try, to exert oneself, strive, undertake” (Libronix Digital Library System, ((LDLS)), v. 2.1b, 2000-2004, NA, 26th ed., GNT). In the biblical context, the word has a variety of meanings and usages. Though many are associated with Satan as the originator, by no means is this universally true throughout the text of Scripture. Therefore, in terms of our usage, ‘temptation’ or to be tempted would mean to be tried, enticed or gently pushed by the enemy of our souls toward anything that would be in conflict with the perfect will of God for our lives.

Harassment

Webster’s II New Riverside University Dictionary (1988: 564) defines harass as, “to annoy or torment repeatedly and persistently or to wear out: exhaust.” The Greek does not have an equivalent word per se. The NASB translates the Hebrew ‘תָּצַר’ (tsoor) as ‘harass’. This word carries the meaning in Hebrew of ‘confine, to shut in, besiege, to shut up, enclose, to show hostility to, be an adversary’ (Strong, 1996). The word is translated ‘harass’ 3 times in the Old Testament (NASB) and is variously translated ‘harass’ or ‘distress’ or ‘bother’ in other translations. For our purposes, I will define harass as a more intensive form of temptation, an on-going type of pressure against a person to entice them toward an immoral or unwise act that would be in conflict with the perfect will of God for their life.

Oppression

When we come to the word oppression, we are moving up the scale of involvement that the demonic may have but also the negative connotations grow stronger. When a person or people group is ‘oppressed’, we recognize almost instinctively that something bad or evil is going on at the least and possibly something very evil at the worst. Webster’s II New Riverside University Dictionary (1988: 825) defines oppression as, ‘to persecute or subjugate by unjust use of force or authority. . . to weigh heavily upon, especially so as to depress the mind or spirits. . . to crush or overwhelm’. The Greek uses several words which are translated to mean oppression. One is ‘καταπονούμενον’ (kataponoumenon) which means, ‘harsh control over one, to use one’s power against one’ (LDLS, v. 2.1b, 2000-2004, NA, 26th ed., GNT). Another is ‘κάκωσιν’ (kakosin) which means ‘ill treatment, ill usage’. The Hebrew לַחֲצוֹת (lachats) is variously translated ‘oppression’ or affliction. The sense is that the word oppression conveys more pressure, more control, and a greater amount of force being put upon a person from the outside. Again, the word does not necessarily convey the understanding that all oppression is

of demonic origin. Yet when speaking of oppression in terms of deliverance ministry, the clear sense is that we are dealing with something that is of greater force, of more pressure being exerted than the word temptation or harassment.

Afflicted

Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary (1988: 83) defines affliction as, "to cast down. . . to inflict physical or mental suffering on. . . a condition of pain, suffering or distress." The Greek uses several words which are translated as 'affliction'. First is 'θλίβουσιν' (thlibousin) means to "to crowd in hard against - 'to press against, to crowd'" (Louw & Nida, 1989). There is also 'μάστιγος' (mastigos) which means 'to beat severely with a whip - 'to whip, to beat with a whip, whipping, flogging' (Louw & Nida, 1989). This word can be a synonym with oppression yet it can also indicate a further step, a heavier weight, a more severe persecution of sorts.

Infested

Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary (1988: 626) defines infest as, 'to spread in or overrun in large numbers so as to be harmful or unpleasant.' Neither the Greek nor Hebrew use an equivalent word for infests or infested. This term comes from Francis MacNutt's book *Deliverance from Evil Spirits* (1995), in which he uses the term infestation as a synonym for possession. MacNutt sees various 'levels' of infestation but as a whole, he uses this category for those who have struggles with the demonic on an internal level, not just the external of temptation or harassment.

Possessed

There may be no word that has caused greater discussion, disagreement or debate among Christians than this one and much of that comes from mistranslations of the Greek. Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary (1988: 918) defines possession as 'having as a possession. . . controlled by or as if by a supernatural force.' MacNutt makes the case that the very word possessed or possession is misleading at best. It seems that to be 'possessed' in the demonic sense generally means to be totally given over to or to have one's will totally submerged by another force or power stronger than one's own will. In my own limited experience, I have yet to meet someone who I would say is 'possessed'. MacNutt argues that the better translation of possessed from the Greek would be to use the word 'demonized' or 'to

have a demon' (1995: 69). Charles Kraft also makes this same observation regarding the translation of the Greek 'δαίμονιον' (daimonion) or 'demonized'. Kraft notes that, "It is far better to use a more neutral term such as "have a demon" or "demonized." Both are more true to the original Greek and also run less risk of frightening people. . . . These more neutral terms do not give more credit to Satan than his due" (1992: 36). Others, such as Anthony Finlay in his book *Demons* (2002) only makes a distinction between obsession and possession, the one being outer harassment and the latter being inner residence of the demonic. I will try to use the terms as Kraft and MacNutt use them, 'to have a demon' or 'to be demonized' rather than using possession, hopefully avoiding some confusion but also avoiding misunderstandings and people being frightened.

With all that said, there are still two basic terms that need to be explored briefly. In doing my research, I was made aware that not everyone uses the term 'deliverance' to mean exorcism or even having anything to do with the ministry of exorcism. It would appear that in Roman Catholic circles, the terms are fairly well defined due to the different liturgies and what is required for each. MacNutt and other Catholic writers are clear that the term 'deliverance' is used mainly for something that a priest can engage in without the express authority of the bishop. This would apply to cases where there appears to be 'oppression' but not 'possession'. Exorcism, on the other hand, at least in the Catholic Church, is a rite which before it is performed, must meet certain criteria and must be performed under the authority of the local bishop. For a Roman Catholic priest or bishop to declare the need for an 'exorcism', they will look for some of the following signs: levitation, (MacNutt, 1995: 68) use of a language or tongue previously unknown, hidden knowledge not previously known or great physical strength (Finlay, 2002: 122). Some writers refer to this distinction between deliverance and exorcism as non-formal versus a formal exorcism, although this is more a Catholic distinction. Another way of looking at the distinction comes from an Italian priest (in Finlay, 2002: 122). He is quoted as saying, "In exorcism we address the Devil in person to force him to leave; . . . in deliverance we call upon God to order the evil to depart. . . deliverance is much more common. . . exorcism is very rare. . ." While giving another way of describing the difference between deliverance and exorcism, I believe Finlay goes in a direction that is not Scriptural. Scripture does not call us to 'call upon God to order the evil to depart' but rather, moving in the authority that Jesus gave us, to, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth *command* the evil to

depart. I would personally use these terms, deliverance and exorcism interchangeably as I don't see enough of a difference to differentiate between them.

In Reformed circles, at least to some of those pastors which I researched, the term deliverance did not necessarily have anything to do with the casting out of unclean spirits. When mentioning the term 'deliverance', the question was, "What are you talking about?" It appears that the word deliverance is also used to denote a broader use of the word in regards to the work of Christ on the cross as it relates to mankind. Deliverance in this context could then be taken to mean what happens when one accepts Christ as their personal Savior. They have in effect, been 'delivered' or as 1 Peter 2:9 (NASB) says, ". . . who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.' One could also see the term being used in relation to someone who has been healed, either supernaturally or through modern medicine as being 'delivered' from their sickness or disease. To use the term deliverance in these contexts is very scriptural in terms of what the work of Christ on the cross accomplished for us. Christ did in fact, 'deliver' us from the curse, from being under the power of sin, from being under the power of the enemy, from the power of sickness, death and from the power of having to be under the power of the demonic. While it is true that deliverance does encompass these and many other aspects of the atonement, for most people, the term deliverance at least in today's parlance, has to do with something happening in the spiritual realm that sets a person free from the influence of the demonic. For our purposes here, we will use the term 'deliverance' as referring to what happens when a person is set free from demonic or unclean spirits by the authority of Jesus Christ as administered through his servants today.

When using the term 'exorcism', as mentioned previously, the Catholic church is quite clear on what is meant. For our purposes again, I use this word as synonymous with 'deliverance', that is the ministry of using the authority of Jesus Christ to cast out demonic or unclean spirits from a person's life. I choose to use the term 'deliverance' as it is a more 'gentle' term, not quite conjuring up the images as the term exorcism is prone to do. Since for many in the USA, that term is so closely linked to the movie, *The Exorcist* released in 1973. While the movie may have had an effect on raising the awareness in people's minds of the supernatural, of the realm of the demonic, it also gave a very unsightly, frightening and unrealistic picture of what can happen to those who get involved in such ministries.

Chapter 4

What is currently being done in non-RCA deliverance ministries?

It may be easier to start out this section with what *isn't* being done across the American church arena in terms of deliverance ministry, but we will stick to our heading! In regards to this area of deliverance ministry, there is currently a vast array of ministries that are operating in today's world. There has been in the last few years, a whole host of books, seminars and conferences, even television specials on exorcism. On November 13, 2001 NBC's *Dateline* ran a special called *Deliver Us From Evil*. They highlighted several deliverance ministries, including a Southern Baptist Pastor, and several other evangelical and Pentecostal deliverance ministries. One interesting part, among many, was that NBC interviewed a Jewish Christian who held a position in the American Psychiatric Association. As MacNutt commented about the above program, "The interviewer could hardly believe what the psychiatrist was saying, and rephrased his questions several times to make sure he really heard what the psychiatrist had to say" (Healing News, Jan/Feb 2002). The psychiatrist was approving of what was happening in terms of deliverance being a valid way of helping people who are deeply struggling with some issues that normal methods of psychiatry or therapy were not able to help. The show highlighted several different ministries from the soft-spoken to the yell and scream at the demons type. *Dateline* highlighted some ministries that I believe give the ministry of deliverance a bad name. These were ministries that have the pastor banging the person who is being delivered with a Bible or yelling at them, making fun of the demonic, and generally just creating a scene. With all that said, it was still interesting to see that a major TV network saw fit to spend time highlighting something which until recently was almost unmentionable.

There is, no doubt, everything going on out there in deliverance ministries from the bizarre to those that unless you knew, you wouldn't be able to tell deliverance was even happening. Don Basham and Derek Prince, starting from the early 60's have had a profound influence on the current deliverance ministries within the US and around the world. The Charismatic renewal movement within the Roman Catholic Church, influenced by Basham and Prince, has taken much of their lead from people such as Francis MacNutt and Father Rufus Pereira, whom MacNutt interviewed part of which he relates in an appendix in his book, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits* (1995: 282f). Within the charismatic and Pentecostal movements, there have been many attempts to enter into deliverance ministries with the result that some have gotten hurt and others confused due to lack of training and good biblical

foundations. The Catholic renewal movement has probably tended to be more balanced as the Catholic Church had a long history of having a rite of exorcism and the theology to back it up. It also has no doubt been much more pastoral on the whole than many outside of the Catholic Church.

Another factor that enters into the rise of an awareness of the spiritual realities and the role within the Christian church of the value of deliverance ministry is the demise of modernity and the rise of postmodernism. One of the characteristics of Post-modernism is the acceptance of spiritual realities, which include both angels and the demonic. Chad Hall, writing in the online magazine called Next-Wave.org notes that for postmoderns (pomos) reality is much different than it was for moderns. He writes, “Moderns interacted with the world according to a scientific mindset. They proved things through observation and such. If you couldn’t prove it, it wasn’t real. Pomos don’t buy that. They know that most of what gets us through life cannot be seen, poked, prodded or sniffed. They are much more into the spiritual, metaphysical, and intuitive stuff. Now Christian should not have a problem with this one. But most do” (Hall, 2002). Someone else has noted that in our ‘postmodern’ world, we may be in the midst of one of the greatest spiritual revivals ever and the fascinating thing is that it’s occurring *outside* of the church (source unknown). Postmoderns are into the spiritual, not necessarily the Christian spiritual realities but spiritual nonetheless. With this in mind, it’s not hard to understand why the topic of the demonic and deliverance is not outside the realm of many people today.

The advent of William Blatty’s *The Exorcist* in the early 70’s, may also be the ‘Hollywood’ factor in the rise in interest in exorcisms. After the book and movie came out, the interest in and people seeking exorcism seemed to skyrocket. Much of this led to people being hurt by those trying to minister to them and in some extreme cases, some even died. Cuneo (2001: 279) reports how in March 1995, “a group of overzealous ministers connected to a tiny Pentecostal sect in the San Francisco Bay Area pummeled a woman to death while trying to evict her demons. Two years later a Korean Christian woman was stomped to death by a deacon and two missionaries operating out of a church in Glendale, California. The three men had gotten carried away trying to expel a demon they believed was lodged in the woman’s chest.” It isn’t too hard to find the weird, the bizarre and downright unscriptural things going on in the name of God and Jesus all over in terms of deliverance ministry. However, let’s not let the fringe elements determine how we view and respond to those who are desperately in

need of compassion and being set free from the oppression of the enemy through the love and power of our Lord Jesus Christ! We must keep in balance the words of Jesus where He said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) and, “And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, . . .” (Mark 16:17).

We should be slow to judge those ministries that seem to be on the fringe. Knowing that God can and does use all kinds of people and methods to accomplish His purposes, it appears that some are not so much trying to be the very presence of Jesus but rather are trying to make a name for themselves by the techniques and theatrics involved.

To name just a few current ministries that are operating today in North America:

Cornerstone Christian Counseling - Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. They employ what they call, ‘Prayer Counseling’ and deal with the demonic during the ebb and flow of ministry time. Prayer Counseling attempts to deal with the ‘root’ issues of struggles and problems, believing that if you can get to the spiritual root of an issue, there is a much higher incidence of health and wholeness that results from the ministry time. Cornerstone was started and is directed by an RCA pastor Rev. Art Zeilstra.¹ Cornerstone attempts to reach out and believe that God is able to bring hope and healing into even the most desperate of situations. They have people trained to work with those that suffer from DID (Dissociative Identify Disorder) to those trained to deal with victims of SRA or Satanic Ritual Abuse. All of this is done with the knowledge and understanding that Jesus is the One who brings healing through the power of the Holy Spirit. This may take some time, there are not necessarily any ‘quick’ fixes but conveying the truth that God loves them and wants their clients to be whole once again.

Deep Healing Ministries - Pasadena, CA. This is a ministry started by Dr. Charles Kraft of Fuller Theological Seminary. Dr. Kraft’s approach is much the same as Cornerstone’s. The only real difference that I can see is Kraft tends to work chronologically from pre-birth to the present while Cornerstone simply goes wherever the Holy Spirit leads. Kraft will also speak to the demonic trying to ascertain names, entry points and legal rights while Cornerstone does not do this, but rather simply asks Jesus to name what is there and deal with it. Kraft’s ministry deals with hurts, woundedness and the demonic seeking to bring wholeness to the person, not just ‘deliverance’. One of Dr. Kraft’s key phrases, sort of his foundational

philosophy when dealing with people and the demonic is, “Jesus always wrapped His power in His love.”³

Doris Wagner with Global Harvest Ministries. Doris does not, as far as I know, have an official ministry devoted to deliverance; however, that is one of her main interests and foci as she works with her husband C. Peter Wagner at Global Harvest Ministries in Colorado Springs, CO. Doris has put together an extensive questionnaire which she uses to help her discern where in a person’s life there may be issues that need to be dealt with.ⁱⁱ This questionnaire covers virtually all areas of a person’s life from their family’s background to health issues, sexual issues, personality issues and everything else. I have found this questionnaire to be helpful in not only discerning what may be going on in a person’s life, but also raising an awareness of things that may need to be dealt with in the course of a ministry time. Doris uses the questionnaire as a discernment tool as she will openly tell you that she does not have the gift of discernment. Today, Doris’ ministry deals mainly with pastors.

Don Dickerman Ministries - Don’s ministry is located in Texas and he does extensive ministry in the prison systems within the US. He carries on a deliverance ministry besides having a ministry of evangelism. People can request a ministry time with Don by filling out an extensive questionnaire on the internet. I have not personally met or dealt with Don, yet the tone of everything he says on his site is in line with a pastoral, loving approach to deliverance.ⁱⁱⁱ

Bob Larson Ministries - Bob tends to focus more on deliverance, cults and false religions. Bob also tends to be more ‘showy’, more theatrical than I would care for and he has also done deliverances over the radio which raises a number of questions for me, especially in the area of how do you show the love of Christ to the person that way. Bob was scheduled to travel to South Africa the end of October of 2004 for an extended ministry trip. It appears from his website that most of Bob’s venues are in hotels rather than churches.^{iv} Bob is also on about 500 radio stations on which he performs deliverances and discusses issues of interest and past exorcisms. Bob’s ministry falls in line with many other deliverance ministries in that he asks the person to forgive whoever may have hurt or sinned against them and / or repent of things that person may have done or been involved with in the past. An interesting side note, Bob’s website is the only one I saw that lists a note about negative things being written about him.

³ From a Deep Healing Seminar in the late 90’s Dr. Kraft put on in Longview, WA. For more information on Deep Healing Ministries, see their website at: www.deephealing.org

The website says, “In your effort to locate our web site, you may have encountered other sites devoted to attacking our ministry. Be aware that these sites contain misinformation, disinformation, twisted facts and outright lies. Many of these accusations are sinister distortions of reality and fabrications designed to look truthful” (Larson Ministries, 2004). If one listens to some of the archives of radio broadcasts which are on this site, Bob tends to focus more on the deliverance, more on the demonic than on the love and power of Jesus Christ. This no doubt has the effect of many evangelicals simply writing him off as someone who is on the fringe.

Ray of Hope Ministries - from Petittcodiac, N.B., Canada. This ministry was really our first formal introduction to deliverance ministry. Ray McGraw heads up this ministry and we had Ray come to our church in Surrey, BC to do some training a number of years ago. Ray’s style tends to be confrontational, almost combative at times in terms of how he teaches and does ministry. Again, I did not experience much of the love of Christ for those receiving ministry. This ministry is one that God used to get me started down this road looking at deliverance ministry in a more serious fashion. Ray travels mainly in Canada but also in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Ray’s ministry focuses on healing and deliverance, and not dealing with the woundedness or hurts such as Kraft’s or Cornerstone’s ministry.^v

PRMI – Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International - This ministry, started by Brick Bradford and now headed by Dr. Brad Long is headquartered in Black Mountain, NC. Brad has spoken in many Reformed churches and is attempting to bring back into the Reformed setting the working out of *sola scriptura*. If Jesus said we should be doing this or that, then let’s do it! They are a balanced ministry focusing on the work of the Holy Spirit in people’s lives which also includes praying for healing and deliverance. PRMI tries to have as a foundation the Word of God and from all the material I have seen from their ministry, everything is based on and from Scripture. They minister in the U.S. and in several other countries around the world, mainly working with Presbyterian and Reformed churches. A former RCA President is currently on their Board of Directors.^{vi}

Healing Rooms - The modern day healing rooms that are operating around the US and in other parts of the world are a direct offspring of John G. Lake’s ministry in the late 1800’s, early 1900’s in the Spokane, Washington area. Today, these rooms are operating in many parts of the country. People can simply drop in, fill out a form indicating their prayer request and receive prayer for healing or deliverance by teams of trained people from local churches. John

G. Lake is reported to have documented over 100,000 healings in the Washington state area during his time. He also ministered heavily in the nation of Africa. The Healing Rooms of Tulare, CA are directed by Rev. Tim Vink, an RCA pastor in Tulare.^{vii}

The Children's Bread - This ministry is run by Pastor Frank Hammond. He and his late wife were the authors of one of the classics in deliverance literature, *Pigs in the Parlor, A Practical Guide to Deliverance* (1973) and numerous other books on deliverance ministry. Frank and his wife pastored churches for over 30 years and then went into full-time teaching and deliverance ministry.^{viii}

Fountain of Freedom Ministries - This ministry is run by Araceli Alvarez, who comes out of a background of witchcraft, the occult and New Age. She has extensive experience in Santeria. Santeria is a blend of the religious background of the Yoruba people who came from Nigeria and Benin to Cuba as slaves during the beginning of the 19th century. In coming to Cuba, their religion was mixed with Roman Catholicism, into which they were forced to convert. Santeria basically means, "the way of the saints." As Alvarez (2004: 57) puts it, "Santeria is essentially an African way of worship drawn into a symbiotic relationship with Catholicism." Fountain of Freedom Ministries is located in California.^{ix}

Cleansing Stream Ministries - CSM is a ministry which is based at Church on the Way, in Van Nuys, CA. This is where Pastor Jack Hayford is the Senior Pastor. Cleansing Stream works on a discipleship / deliverance model. This model has people work through a 3 – 4 month discipleship program culminating in a Cleansing Stream Retreat where groups from a regional area come together for an intense time of worship and deliverance. Several key areas such as dealing with issues of rejection, sexual purity and shame are dealt with. CSM is currently headed up by Pastor Chris Hayward.^x

Refuge Ministries - This ministry is headed by Pastor Jeff Harshbarger with his wife Liz. Jeff works mainly with those coming out of Satanism and the after effects of that involvement. Jeff's ministry can be reached at www.refugeministries.cc

There are also some pseudo-Christian 'deliverance' ministries out there. While doing my research, I ran across an RCA pastor who noted that there was someone in his town who did deliverances and had a questionnaire that he used. I said I was interested in talking with him so later I got connected with him. This man noted that what he does is called

'psychosynthesis'. He also noted he was with the Unity church, which he said is what all Christian churches are becoming a part of more and more. In further questioning him about his beliefs, he said he wasn't sure there was a devil or Satan, that people are basically good, we're born in grace, not in sin and a number of other interesting beliefs. During my conversation with him, I reflected back to him that what he was saying was definitely not Reformed theology but he kept insisting that all churches are moving in this direction anyway. When asked how he went about doing deliverance, he used words such as, "when we're in the aura, the orbit of Christ's presence, we command the evil, the force to depart from the person" (From a phone conversation). After that, I called the RCA pastor back and reflected some of what I'd heard back to him and encouraged him to seek out evangelical people who were trained in this ministry or have some of his elders or others who may be interested to get trained rather than sending people to this man in question. He noted then that he'd heard from a few people who had gone to see this person that they felt really uncomfortable with the theology and his techniques

There are, no doubt, many different ministries out there, many being done with love and compassion in the Name of Jesus and others being done for profit, or simply out of a desire to make a name for oneself as an exorcist. This is just a very, very brief sampling of what is happening around North America in terms of deliverance ministries. In perusing the various books and articles that are available on this subject, it is easy to see that there is much happening in many parts of the country.

This brief sampling that was just given does not in any way include what is happening in other parts of the world. One only has to read through some of the papers from the Lausanne Theology Strategy Working Group/Intercessory Working Group which met in Nairobi, Kenya from August 16-22, 2000. It was a consultation convened by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the Association of Evangelicals in Africa entitled "Deliver Us From Evil". While the conference dealt with issues of spiritual warfare, many if not most touched on the subject of deliverance as a ministry of the church for today. To name just a few speakers; Dr. Hwa Yung who is the Principal of the Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, spoke on '*Some Issues in a Systematic Theology That Takes Seriously the Demonic*', David G. Burnett spoke on '*Spiritual Conflict and Folk Religion*', Neuza Itioka spoke on, '*A Brazilian Perspective: Case Studies from Brazil*', from a European perspective, Ole Skjerbæk Madsen spoke on, '*Spiritual Conflict among Western Seekers*', and finally, Yusufu Turaki spoke on '*Africa Traditional*

Religious System as Basis of Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare'.^{xi} It is easy to see that the issue of spiritual warfare and the demonic are not unknown topics around the world, especially among those places where 'westernized' Christianity has yet to have a great impact. It is also interesting to note that among those nations where Christianity has had an influence for many years, the topic of spiritual warfare and the demonic is once again being discussed in conferences, seminars and even seminaries. This may be in part due to many factors but the influence of 'postmodernism' on Western culture with its yearning for a spiritual reality is no doubt a big factor.

In summary, there appears to be much happening within North America as a whole and more and more within evangelical circles. A quick search of *Google*⁴ for 'deliverance ministry' led to a total of over 231,000 'hits' for that phrase! There was everything listed from demonbusters.com to a host of others. The question that again needs to be asked is this, why, with so much happening around the world and even within the U.S., is there not more happening within the boundaries of the RCA? In a nation that has a top selling drug of Prozac for depression and a record number of psychologist's and psychiatrists at work trying to help people, where is the Church? More specifically, why is the church sending people to these professionals, when we have the answers *and the power* to help their hurts and pain? To get at that question, let's start by looking at the question of deliverance ministry from a RCA perspective and the research that was done to discover some of the current attitudes, thinking and practice with the RCA.

⁴ See Google at www.google.com, probably the world's largest internet search engine with over 8 billion web sites indexed. This search was done on January 11, 2005

Chapter 5

Research Background

The question of where one begins doing research is not always an easy one! As I entered into this question, it seemed to serve only to raise more questions than answers. First, one of the main ideas that needed to be settled for me first was the question of doing quantitative versus qualitative research.

The challenge was this: how do you do a survey, or for that matter, any type of research in the area of deliverance ministry within the RCA without having some sort of bias, if you will? After all, this is not a common ministry within the RCA context and the very fact of doing surveys and research was certain to raise questions among the participants of the research.

Quantitative research at the beginning appeared to be the way I was headed. I wanted to quantify what was being done or not being in the area of deliverance ministry within the RCA. I at first thought this was the best option as it tended to be the preferred method in coming to a more scientific answer. However, in beginning to research exactly how I would do this provided not only ample stumbling blocks, but also some valuable lessons in the process!

The methodological issues at first appeared quite straight-forward but later proved to be a bit more daunting. At first, setting out with quantitative research in mind, I set out to prove the theory that the reason deliverance ministry is not more extensively practiced or practiced at all within the context of the RCA was that there was simply ignorance or a view of Scripture that was not as authoritative as we Reformed people would like to believe. Starting from this premise, I attempted to put together a survey that involved a lot of yes/no questions, questions of rank from 1 – 10 and so on. The first drafts of this survey I sent to a professor at Hope College in Holland, MI who has done extensive research on the demographics and related areas of the RCA for many years. His response and feedback were both helpful and discouraging all at the same time! His notes were that, one it appeared I was trying to build a list of possible people that would invite me to come and teach on this subject or two, that most of the RCA pastors would write this off and thus myself as a consequence as being somewhere on the fringe of Reformed theology. A number of his comments I believe were right on as I reflected on them. Originally, the survey questions were biased toward finding those who might be interested in learning more and I would be the one to offer that. His comments therefore,

proved invaluable in giving me some clearer direction of how to approach the research problem.

The sheer mechanics of looking into how to actually tabulate and come up with something that was meaningful for the scope of this paper also proved to be at least at the time, somewhat insurmountable from my perspective. I looked into software programs that were able to provide the necessary web-based surveys I was looking for. I looked into the mechanics of how to get pastors to participate in such a survey with all the concerns about privacy issues today. I looked into the software that could tabulate this information and provide some sort of meaningful feedback that I would be able to use.

First, the software is very expensive and was outside of my ability to afford it. Secondly, after conversations with several people, straight statistical data, while it might be somewhat eye-opening as to where RCA pastors stand in light of this ministry, would not necessarily answer my questions of why they were or were not involved in such a ministry. Finally, because I was searching more for the 'gut' responses, this strictly quantitative approach was not what I wanted.

In making the switch to qualitative research, it helped to understand that I was not to bring my theory into the research question but to allow the research to help form my theory. As Bryman (1999, 38) notes in his article, ". . . the qualitative researcher's need to see the world through his or her subject's eyes." This is what I really wanted to do in the first place, discover not simply statistically what was or was not happening in terms of deliverance ministry, but rather 'why' it was or wasn't happening. The only way to do that was to begin doing some research that would engage the subject's more on a one to one relationship rather than through the means of an impersonal survey instrument.

In his article mentioned above on the subject of the differences in research processes, Bryman noted that one of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research was the nature of the data obtained. He noted in a table outlining some differences that quantitative tends to have 'hard, reliable' data whereas qualitative data is more a 'rich, deep' kind. This is what I was searching for, the depth of not only finding out what was happening, but what lies behind those ministries or lack of the same. With that in mind, I was able then to proceed to put together what I would call an 'unstructured/structured' telephone interview. What I mean by that is that when starting my interviews, I had a list of questions in front of me to work

through. During the course of the interview many times the subject would give an answer that would lead to another question not necessarily on my list of questions to be asked. This led to further insight from that person and a deeper understanding of what they were trying to say.

Jaco Dreyer (1998: 10) notes that the, “. . . debate on a participant or an observer approach is usually linked to the debate between quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The two methodological options for practical theologians are thus either a quantitative approach with its observer perspective, or a qualitative approach with its participant perspective.” He goes on to say, “There is a consensus that both perspectives are required.” With this in mind, it was a bit easier to put the survey together noting that the research methodology didn’t necessarily have to be an either/or decision but could be a both/and one. This helped tremendously in putting together the survey questions knowing I wasn’t necessarily ‘bound’ to either methodology but could use a combination of both. Dreyer (1998: 10), quotes Dingemans who stated that, “today, *coalescence of approaches and complementarity of methods* are the key phrases in Practical Theology.” Again, it wasn’t a matter of choosing one or the other methodologies but a recognition that both had something to offer in their own right.

The practical way this worked out in doing the surveys was that I felt more free when questions were asked of me during the interviews as to why this subject. I was able to respond more freely rather than trying to be the ‘detached observer’.

The process of putting together the survey took some time and much trial and error as I alluded to above. Once I was settled on taking a mainly qualitative approach, the design of the questions I would use for my interviews became in some ways much more involved. I knew I needed to ask some questions that would not only be very non-threatening but also give me a bit of background on those I was interviewing. I then gave some explanation as to what I was talking about in broad terms so that the interviewee and I would initially be at a common starting point. I inserted this explanation after doing a pilot interview with a pastor from a Reformed tradition although not from the RCA. He felt it would be very helpful to at least explain what I was and was not talking about as I conducted the interviews. Once past that, I would then begin the interview by asking some very basic questions to try and ascertain where the person was coming from. With these questions, came others or some were skipped as being non-relevant depending on how the previous question was answered. The challenge in asking

the questions during the interview was to try and ask questions that would get at the ‘heart’ of the issue at hand, namely this person’s understanding of deliverance ministry. I tried to ask questions from as many different angles as possible to get as full of a picture of where that person was as possible. The questions that were asked, as we will see later, tried to uncover not only a person’s worldview to this area of ministry but also their understanding of Scripture, although admittedly this was more deduced from their overall answers than from specific questions.

With that said as background, let me lay out how the interview was conducted and what questions were included. Later I will lay out the process I used to determine who it was I would actually interview. I first contacted everyone I was to interview by e-mail to set up a time and phone number to reach them at that their convenience. In this initial e-mail contact, I gave a short explanation of what I was looking for, the time it would take, what I was doing and I simply stated my subject area was deliverance ministry. I then set up the interviews and conducted them over the course of three months. Most of the interviews were about one half hour in length and all of them were over the telephone.

The questions I asked were as follows:

Survey of RCA Pastors

As we begin, is it alright with you if I tape this call so I don’t have to try and feverishly take notes while we talk? (all respondents were fine with this)

1. What is your particular ministry?

Pastor Retired Missionary Educator Spec. Ministry
Associate Pastor Youth Pastor

2. What is your age?

20 - 29 30 - 39 40 - 49 50 – 59 60 +

3. What RCA Classis are you a part of? (note: an RCA ‘Classis’ is a group of RCA churches within a certain geographical region).

4. Did you grow up in the RCA or did you come in from another denomination?

grew up in the RCA Came from _____

As we begin the questions, I would like to clarify the subject matter for the sake of this survey. When I refer to 'deliverance ministry, I am referring to the ministry of using the authority of Jesus to cast out or in the King James, 'exorcise' a person from demonic oppression, affliction or harassment. While saying that, I am not referring to the ministry of healing or setting people free from diseases or illnesses, although they may be and often are related in the New Testament, I am only referring to the specific ministry of 'delivering a person from evil, unclean or demonic spirits.

With that said, I am referring to conducting this ministry in such a way that is both biblically sound and pastorally caring for the person receiving the ministry.

1. Are you at all familiar with the nature and practice of ministering to the spiritually oppressed, commonly called deliverance or exorcism?

2. If you have been introduced to such a ministry as 'deliverance', where did that introduction come from? within the RCA another denomination a Para-church ministry Books other people

3. In the last 5 years, have you read any books or articles in regards to the ministry of deliverance or exorcism?

4. What are your impressions of current books on deliverance or exorcism? Why?

5. If you have ever been involved in a 'deliverance' with a person, how would you comment on that experience to another Pastor?

6. If you were to hear the word deliverance or exorcism in a Christian setting, what would that mean to you? Why?

7. How do you view evil in the world today? (This question was added after the first couple interviews.)

8. If a member of your congregation came to you and said, "Pastor, I think I'm being oppressed by demons," how would you respond? Why?

9. What would a person who is spiritually oppressed by the demonic need to do in order to be free from that oppression?

10. If you have ever seen or heard someone doing this type of ministry, would you say they were theologically sound? Why or why not?

11. What elements of your theology help you to evaluate the area of deliverance or exorcism?

12. When it comes to sorting out a theological issue you're facing, to what or to whom do you turn?

13. What does it mean when Jesus said, "I give you authority"?

14. Would you say that spiritual gifts are necessary to minister in the area of deliverance? Why or why not?

15. What would be your response if someone you were counseling spoke in a voice not their own or otherwise appeared to be acting out of the ordinary?

16. Why would you respond like that?

17. How does what you see or hear on TV, magazines, radio in terms of deliverance or exorcism influence you?

18. How does psychology or psychotherapy influence your view of deliverance or exorcism?

19. Would you say a 'deliverance' ministry is a valid Christian ministry for today? Why or why not?

20. As a pastor, what concerns or fears would you have about such a ministry if it were to operate in your congregation?

21. If you have to defend such a ministry of deliverance to your elders, how would you go about it?

22. Any further comments or questions you think I should be asking?

The interviews proved to be very enlightening as most of those I interviewed didn't know me. The fact that I am also an RCA pastor helped to open some doors as well. I believe most, if not all were very honest in their answers. A quick overview of who was involved may be helpful at this point.

First, I only interviewed ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament in the RCA. I wanted to delineate this group from the elders and deacons within the RCA for a reason. Traditionally pastors are the ones who tend to set the agenda, set the focus, the vision, and the general tone of the ministry of the particular church they are serving. For the list of pastors that I interviewed, the names came from two sources. One is from a friend in the RCA who travels extensively with his work within the RCA and has a working knowledge of almost every pastor and church within the RCA. I asked him to submit a list of people who he thought would be appropriate for such a survey. He gave me a list of about 20 names which he saw as being somewhat of a cross-section of the RCA in terms of evangelical/liberal, across the USA and Canada, Pastors and Professors. With this in hand, I added some more names of those I knew across the RCA, all of which would fit into the 'evangelical' grouping. I ended up with a total of 21 ordained pastors within the RCA. While almost 1/3 of all RCA churches are on the East

coast of the US, I did not try to have the corresponding percentage in my survey due to the following. In the RCA, pastors are not 'assigned' to a certain church or classis. Pastors can move from one church to the next freely, as they are called to such a church. With this in mind and bearing in mind the fact that the 'liberal' end of the RCA tends to be on the East coast, I opted for a simply cross-section rather than trying to keep my numbers relative to where the most RCA churches are located. The other factor which would have been interesting, but not necessarily relative to this project, was to ask what seminary each had graduated from. As I note later, I graduated from Fuller which is known as an evangelical seminary and it wasn't a part of the curriculum there, so it would be a bit unfair to pinpoint any particular seminary as not having been up to speed and teaching in this area.

They came from 13 different classes within the RCA from California to Ontario, Canada to New York City. Of those I interviewed, 19 were men and 2 were women. Their ages ranged from 30 to over 60 years of age. Thirteen grew up in the RCA while the rest came from five different denominations and 2 came in from previously unchurched backgrounds. All the interviews were recorded with permission and none of their names, churches or ministries will be mentioned to protect their privacy and honesty in their answers.

As noted above, the questions provided not only some basic statistical information on the variety of backgrounds and involvement of those taking the surveys, but also gave some insight into the heart, the why they answered the way they did. On several occasions, I would ask side questions not asked of all, but prompted by a specific answer that was given. These proved most helpful as once again, it gave me a glimpse into the window of the heart as to why a pastor answered the way he or she did.

Chapter 6

Preliminary Results

What lies behind the apparent lack of ministry in terms of deliverance or exorcism ministry within the RCA was the basic question I was trying to answer. Many and various viewpoints were expressed which gave hints at the underlying reasons why some are open to and actually engaging in this ministry and for others it “isn’t even on my radar screen.”

The question that I was attempting again to get at was, not so much what is happening within the RCA in terms of deliverance ministry, but rather, why is it that some are open and some are not to this ministry within their own ministries? In asking the specific questions, I was attempting to get at the heart of the question by a number of different avenues. First of all, questions such as, ‘In the last 5 years, have you read any books or articles in regards to the ministry of deliverance or exorcism?’ This was to look at the question from an ‘intellectual’ point of view, or are they attempting to engage in the subject from a sense of intellectual curiosity. Secondly, questions such as, ‘How do you view evil in the world today?’ (admittedly a broad question) and ‘What elements of your theology help you evaluate an area such as deliverance ministry?’ attempted to get at the issue from more of a theological understanding. Thirdly, the question of ‘What does it mean when Jesus said, “I give you authority?”’ attempted to get at the question from a hermeneutic / exegetical standpoint. Fourthly, questions such as ‘If you have ever been involved in a deliverance with a person, how would you comment on that experience to another pastor?’ and ‘What would be your response if someone you were counseling spoke in a voice not their own or otherwise appeared to be acting out of the ordinary?’ attempted to get at the question from a more experiential aspect. Finally, from a pastoral standpoint, questions such as ‘As a pastor, what concerns or fears would you have about such a ministry if it were to operate in your congregation?’ and ‘If you had to defend such a ministry of deliverance to your elders, how would you go about it?’ The one set of questions that were not asked were in regards to trying to ascertain whether the subjects were ‘evangelical’ or not. George Barna from the Barna Research Group has done extensive research in this area which is fascinating. That may be an area to add to future research in this area, but was beyond the scope of this paper.

It will be quickly noted I believe, when reading through the questions asked, that some of the questions relate more to the ‘how’ of deliverance ministry than to why or why not. The

basis behind this was to gain an understanding of whether or not a participant understood deliverance ministry or not. Early on it was fairly easy to see that many of the respondents did not, at least from my perspective and others who have been involved in this ministry, fully grasp or for some hardly grasp at all what was involved in working through a deliverance with a person. Many of the answers in this regards related to issues of fear, the unknown or simply were issues of worldview. Some pastors clearly gave the impression that 'deliverance' as I had outlined it to them, was not really a part of their ministry or for that matter, their church's ministry at all, therefore, there was no need to understand the 'how' of deliverance ministry. Issues of worldview lie behind some of these answers, for many respondents did not even see the need for such a ministry except in very dire, unusual circumstances. How can that be when it was roughly 25% of Jesus' ministry?

For other participants, the questions relating to the 'how' of ministry brought responses that indicated no clear biblical understanding what it would take to rid a person of demonic spirits. Again, this indicated to me either a non-Reformed worldview, a low-view of Scripture, or from an intellectual standpoint, as I deal with later, simply not understanding what is involved in freeing a person from demonic oppression.

As a starting point, it was interesting to note that none of the subjects who were familiar with deliverance ministry were introduced to that ministry from 'within the RCA' except for one who had been introduced by an elder who served on the board of Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International (PRMI). This organization attempts to bring back into the Reformed context the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit which includes the ministry of deliverance. Most had been introduced to this ministry either through the reading of books or through 'other people', a catch-all category outside of the categories mentioned in question #2.

This gives us at the very least a glimpse that pastors within the RCA are not being taught this within the context of their seminary training and have not been introduced to this ministry while growing up within the RCA. One pastor noted that he had been introduced to this aspect of ministry from a group who visited his church from Honduras. Another noted simply, "the charismatic world." What emerges from the research in regards to this point is that it appears that most, if not all of the RCA pastors who have been introduced to deliverance ministry, did not receive their introduction from within the context of the Reformed faith, either growing up within the RCA or having been introduced during their seminary training. This

question may already give us a hint as to the ‘why’ we as the RCA are not more active in this ministry, perhaps because we’re not being taught this in our seminary training. Even though I graduated from Fuller Theological Seminary, deliverance ministry is not a part of the standard Master of Divinity training track. The area of the supernatural, of demonic beings, is glossed over fairly quickly within the systematic theology courses. Except for the fact that some of the professors on staff at Fuller are open to this ministry and have taught it, I would not have been introduced to it either, at least during my seminary days.

Intellectual Understandings

From the intellectual angle, it was interesting to note the various responses. From the question, ‘have you read any books or articles in regards to the ministry of deliverance or exorcism?’ there were 13 positive and the rest had not read anything. This means that of the 21 participants, almost 40% had not read anything in this area! If roughly 4 out of 10 pastors are not reading, learning or growing in this area, this gives us a clue as to why so little may be happening within the RCA concerning deliverance. A similar question, the first one asked after the brief introduction I would go through with them was, ‘Are you at all familiar with the nature and practice of ministering to the spiritually oppressed commonly called deliverance or exorcism?’ yielded similar results. Roughly 60% were while 20% were only somewhat and 20% were not familiar at all. Again, if our pastors are not familiar with a certain aspect of ministry, one can be fairly certain that the greater church or at the very least that congregation is not going to be aware or open to this ministry either.

Of those who had read any books, by far most were positive in the evaluation while some had some interesting responses. One pastor noted that the ‘spiritual realm is a dangerous realm’ while another’s response was ‘guarded’.

The question, “What comes to mind when they hear the word deliverance or exorcism,” one pastor noted that he had, ‘Never heard the two words joined together or made synonymous’. The majority perceived those two words as having to do with the casting out of demonic spirits, although many weren’t entirely clear on what that entailed. Another noted that, ‘after everything else has been exhausted, every other avenue has been exhausted, it’s quite an act of submission, of desperation, and I would be suspicious of it.’ One pastor saw a difference in that deliverance would mean, ‘trying to change people from a homosexual orientation while exorcism would be the casting out of evil spirits.’ This comment echoed

another that, ‘deliverance I think of in terms of salvation through Jesus Christ. . . from the power of evil and sin and death in our lives’ while exorcism is the sense of calling forth demons in the Name of Christ’ (it’s worthy to note this reaction comes from the reading of some novels dealing with the subject). Finally, the comment that, ‘In North America . . . it would probably mean . . . being delivered from their sins’ points to an understanding that there are cultural differences that exist in how we view some things not only intellectually but theologically as well.

Intellectually, there appears to be a broad spectrum in how RCA pastors perceive this area of deliverance. There were many different meanings and understandings of the terminology that are attached to this ministry. There were viewpoints about ‘deliverance’ from ‘not on the radar screen’, to people getting saved, to spiritual warfare, to casting out of evil spirits. The question that comes to mind from these types of responses, is how can we have such divergent understandings when in the Reformed tradition, we are constantly called to *sola scriptura*? Is part of the reason we see so little in the way of deliverance ministry within our Reformed setting is that we have no common understanding about the terminology and the broader issue of spiritual warfare and what that entails?

Theological Understandings

In raising questions of how this ministry would be viewed or approached from a theological standpoint, once again there were many viewpoints discussed. To the question, ‘How do you view evil in the world today?’, all of the respondents echoed a biblical view that evil is systemic, evil is real, that Satan and his legions are real, that man is responsible through sinful acts and that evil is a ‘negation of the good’ as Augustine would say. Admittedly, this was a very broad question but I wanted to get at whether RCA pastors had succumbed to the ‘demythologizing’ of the New Testament by some in recent scholarly circles, such as the *Jesus Seminar*.

The question, ‘What does it mean when Jesus said, “I give you authority?”’ was again directed at discerning how RCA pastors view Scripture and what Jesus said. This question provoked a wider range of responses. One response was, “I don’t think those words mean the same in every gospel, every time, they’re used.” On the surface I would agree yet this also points toward a certain vagueness, an uncertainty of what Scripture seems to be saying, it might even be giving oneself an ‘out’ in terms of not wanting to get at the heart of what the gospel

calls us to be about. The response, “I think that probably means to every person a different thing” again points in the direction of allowing a certain vagueness of what Scripture says in order to accommodate a person’s own action or inaction in terms of a particular ministry. The statement, ‘giving authority to me means that it empowers me to manage my life, to make choices and be responsible for it. . .’ sounds as though the ‘authority’ of Jesus is being equated with the work, power and presence of the Holy Spirit. While no one can deny that the authority we have in Christ is exercised by and through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, this does not mean that our authority and the person of the Holy Spirit are one and the same.

To boil the responses down to the above question, I would say about half the responses were what I would understand as a biblical authority to act, in the Name of Jesus, in the arena of deliverance ministry. The other half of the responses to this question were more of a broad type authority to live my life, to control sin, to walk as Jesus calls us to.

A broader question, not necessarily dealing with deliverance ministry but trying to get at how RCA pastors view Scripture, where do they turn when faced with a theological issue brought some interesting responses. Almost 44% of the respondents said when asked the question, ‘When it comes to sorting out some theological issue you’re facing, to what or to whom do you turn?’ that they would turn first to ‘other’s’ and not Scripture. I found this fascinating! The rest of the group to one degree or another, would first turn to Scripture and then look to others within their community, their circle of influence to help them work through the question they were facing. As I reflected on these responses, it was easy to bounce back and forth between these two responses. For one, as Reformed believers, part of a covenant community and believing that God works through covenant communities, why would one not turn to the community of faith to work at discerning the issue at hand? On the other side of the coin, we, as Reformed believers have as a motto, ‘*sola scriptura*’ and Scripture should be our first line of defense. Was there a right or wrong answer then? No, I believe both could be right depending on the circumstance and the question or issue facing a person. Interesting though, the response, “I would turn to Scripture but I think that can sometimes be pretty vague, . . .” was from one who was also fairly skeptical of the entire ministry as a whole.

The final question in this theological category is the one dealing with the impact of psychology and psychiatry on how pastors viewed deliverance ministry. Again, the responses took a wide range. Some, coming from a viewpoint of not having anything to do with

deliverance ministry, saw psychology as their, ‘first line of response to any strange behavior on the part of a person including what might be considered the demonic.’ Some were very skeptical of what psychology had to offer seeing this field as coming from a place that is unable to deal effectively with the spiritual realm. The majority of pastors saw psychology as helpful in determining, in trying to analyze what may be going on in terms of the vast array of mental illnesses that have been identified. Others did not see psychology as an either/or but as one said, ‘there’s a benefit to both (psychology and deliverance ministry) and the key is discerning how they fit together.’ A few leaned toward how one pastor summed up his feelings in terms of how psychology / psychiatry influence him by saying, ‘very little because it’s pretty much an adversarial or contrary opinion.’ Interesting side note here. The few that felt the field of psychology had little to offer were the ones who were most ‘into’ deliverance ministry. This may indicate an unbalance toward seeing everything as spiritual on their part. Again, we see an array of viewpoints from how psychology has very little to do with deliverance, to using it as one of the tools that, ‘. . . God has given us, it’s a product of His grace,’ to those who would almost use psychology exclusively as opposed to the ministry of deliverance.

What does psychology have to do with our understanding of theology? Our theology and worldview is impacted deeply by the modern science of psychology when, as one pastor said, ‘I think a lot of Scripture references were attributed to demons, but that a different understanding of mental health, had that happened in this day, wouldn’t be called demon possession.’ To say this again seems to point to the issue of worldview, of how we as RCA pastors view Scripture and its authority for our lives and ministry. My immediate question to such a response would be, “Was Jesus wrong then, did He not know what He was dealing with?” The very question seems a bit absurd!

In answering the question why are we not more involved in this arena, part of the answer lies in what appears to be how some at least, view Scripture and how influenced we are by the modern scientific disciplines without possibly even knowing it.

Hermeneutic Understandings

This category may be a bit more vague in that no direct questions were asked in how the respondents interpreted Scripture yet, I believe some conclusions can clearly be drawn from some of the responses given. To the question, ‘what would a person who is spiritually oppressed need to do in order to be free from that oppression?’, there were many different

answers. This question seemed to invoke more responses that came not from a sense of understanding what Scripture says but more from a sense of what would 'seem right to do' in that situation. Some of the responses clearly revealed a sense of not knowing, or ignorance in what would be involved in working through a deliverance such as one who said, '. . . God would need to intervene . . . but I'm not sure how that would happen. I think that could happen as easily through therapy as through a 'magic incantation'. This is an interesting response as it reveals a skeptical attitude and a tendency to lean toward the science of psychology. Again, the question of understanding and worldview comes to the forefront. Responses such as, '. . . opening themselves up to God,' or 'the person needs to be available to be acted upon' or 'In the case of the non-Christian, it would be a matter of repentance and invitation of Christ into their hearts and with that comes the presence of the Holy Spirit and I really think that God's power will take over in that situation. In the case of a believer, I'm still very sketchy about that.' This line of reasoning again seems to stem from a lack of understanding about how deliverance ministry works, but also reveals some wide-spread debates within Christian circles of 'can a Christian have a demon?'

There were two other major lines of discussion that came out of this question. First was the sense that, 'the demon would have to be cast out by someone other than myself because I don't feel I have enough experience with it.' A number mentioned something along the line of having those with either the 'gift of deliverance' or 'more experience' work with the person involved. While I believe there is a legitimate concern here from a pastoral standpoint, could this not also be skepticism about deliverance ministry itself or the sense that this is better left to the 'experts' be clouding what is being said here? Do these responses relate to how we understand Scripture when Jesus said, "I give you authority to cast out, heal, . . ." (Luke 9:1-2 paraphrased).

The second line of responses was along the lines of dealing with past issues of generational sin, familial issues, past history of occult involvement, past sin issues, and working through repentance and forgiveness. Then the person would renounce and rebuke the evil. This response interestingly, was indicative of those who had had some experience or those who were involved on a semi-regular basis in the area of deliverance. It would appear that experience can play a part in how we interpret Scripture and deal with situations that may confront us in the day to day life of ministry.

The responses by those who had not been involved or knew very little about the ministry of deliverance indicated that the ‘fear factor’ may easily come into play more often than we would like to admit. Generally speaking, most of us are reluctant to move into an area in which we are unfamiliar, especially when you’re the ‘pastor’ and supposed to know everything there is to know! I believe the responses conveyed another part of the reason why some are reluctant to be involved in this ministry, namely that we are simply not aware of what is involved and may actually be a bit afraid of venturing into unknown spiritual territory.

Experiential Understandings

This set of questions, for the most part, could not directly address the experiential part of the equation simply because most of the pastors interviewed did not have any experience in regards to deliverance ministry. Therefore, the questions addressed the experiential question more at a hypothetical level for most than at an actual experiential level. The most innocuous experiential question was, “How does what you see or hear on TV, magazines, radio in terms of deliverance or exorcism influence you?” One pastor found it interesting that I had chosen this subject for my thesis, “. . . because at least in our culture, I never encounter it.” To sum up the remainder of the responses would be the pastor who said, “most of it ‘underwhelms’ me for integrity and credibility. . .” At least on the surface, it would appear that most RCA pastors are not, at least in their view, influenced too greatly by what they see or hear in the media today.

The other key experiential question that was asked was for most but not all, a hypothetical question. That question was phrased as, ‘What would be your response if someone you were counseling spoke in a voice not their own or otherwise appeared to be acting out of the ordinary?’ A response which sort of typified the worldview of many pastors was, “I would get them to someone more qualified than I to do psychological counseling.” Going on, this pastor said, “I think demonic oppression often takes psychological form and that a Christian counselor, . . . can deal with that better than I.” Another response which echoed this one was the pastor who said, “. . . I know there are those who are psychologically unbalanced who can do those kind of things too so I would push for an examination of some sort and then I would report it to the elders.” These sort of responses again seemed to typify a worldview of some RCA pastors that has kept science and psychology at the forefront.

There were two other main responses to this question. The main response was one of what I would simply label as fear or lack of understanding. Responses such as, “I’d be scared

beyond belief” or “I’d be somewhat taken aback or shocked. . .” or “I’d be scared. I would be scared enough I’d think to myself is this something I’m in over my head.” I suppose I’d feel threatened.” One last example would be “I’d want to be very careful in dealing directly from my readings and understandings, there’s a great danger in dealing with demonic power if you don’t know what you’re doing.” These responses all echo a sense that there would be fear, confusion, feelings of being threatened, of apparently completely not understanding what could be happening. Along with these responses, many responded with a sense of trying to discern and also vigorously praying for protection for themselves and the person involved. It was interesting to note that most would pray for protection, believing that God would answer that prayer but be somewhat clueless about really how to proceed in that situation. Does this point toward what Paul Hiebert called, ‘the Excluded Middle’? We’ll examine this in further detail later on.

The final responses that this question invoked came from those who had some experience in dealing with the demonic. One pastor simply said, “We’d jump on it. It’d be time to say we’re dealing with another being besides yourself in this room and we need to get rid of that one.” Another said, “In the Name of Jesus Christ I say come out! I mean what are you going to do? I’d get right on it and address it as if it we’re a spirit.” One final example was, “My response would be to bind that spirit, to seek to identify that spirit and to differentiate between that person and any demonic spirit seeking to use that person as a voice.” These responses typified those who, in one form or another, had seen or been involved in deliverance with someone. The interesting part here was what appeared, again at least on the surface, a somewhat lack of discerning and instead launching into areas where there may actually be some psychological issues going on. The respondents who were willing to ‘go after’ whatever it was that was speaking tended also, across the survey, to have more of a supernatural, biblical worldview that was grounded in Scripture.

Pastoral Understandings

Looking at the issue of deliverance from a pastoral standpoint provided some interesting responses. The questions looking at this issue from a pastoral viewpoint were hypothetical again as most of the respondents had never personally dealt with the issue as such. The question, ‘If a member of your congregation came to you and said, “Pastor, I think I’m being oppressed by demon,” how would you respond?’ provided a glimpse into the pastor’s heart of all of the respondents. Most simply responded by saying things such as “Let’s talk

about that” or “I’d ask them to explain their experiences and why they feel that way”. Others admitted that they would, “quickly as possible get them to someone more qualified to do psychological counseling.” Along this same line of thought another said, “My first reaction would be to send this person to some type of mental health therapist to talk with.”

The overwhelming responses were very pastoral in nature, even if the pastor felt clueless as to actually how to handle the situation. All of the respondents responded with a heart of compassion toward the person although many openly said they felt lacking in what to actually do to help or intervene in the situation. This question does not get necessarily at the question of why we don’t or aren’t more engaged in this ministry except for the possibility that we tend to respond more with a pastor’s heart toward situations (which is not a bad thing) than actively seeking to discern what is going on in the spiritual realm.

The question toward the end of the survey, ‘what fears or concerns would you have about such a ministry if it were to operate in your congregation?’ received some interesting responses. Those who have been involved or are currently involved in this ministry really didn’t have any ‘fears’ to speak of other than a desire to conduct the ministry in a biblically balanced way. The remainder of the respondent’s answers fell into roughly one of three categories. The largest group, about 40% voiced concerns that could be grouped under the rubric ‘immaturity’ concerns. They used words like concern for the ‘weaker brother in the church,’ or the “uninformed” or for those who are not, “theologically well-grounded.” Concerns about abuse of the ministry, causing division within the church, people getting hurt were all a part of the answers under the broad term, immaturity.

The next largest concern was what one pastor called, ‘sensationalism.’ The sense was that people are always looking for the spectacular, the power, the latest craze, and this could just be it for the church! The fear is that people would either ‘become addicted to the deliverance and the display of power’ or that ‘people would become puffed up in the Corinthian sense . . .’ Coupled with the fear, the concern of the spectacular was the concern that there be people properly trained and remain humble as then engage in this ministry.

The last and smallest category was more of a personal fear of the pastor answering than of the church as a whole. Answers such as ‘my gut level says I’d have a lot of people walking out if I did this kind of ministry’ give some real clues to why some may not be willing to engage or even look into the prospect of whether God may be calling them to do so. The other

key response was from one pastor who after laughing said, 'I'd lose 80% of my congregation, I know that, there's no chance that such a thing would happen in my church, in this century!' I went on to ask why that would be and again the response was telling, 'I have a very scientifically-oriented congregation of scientists and engineers who are skeptical, many of them about the basic claims of the gospel, about the divinity of Jesus Christ. If I tried to do an exorcism thing here (laughter) they'd be out the door.' All of these responses, whether it's a fear or concern for the sensationalistic aspect or for the spiritually immature, or simply because they don't want to lose members, gives us some good indicators of at least part of the answer to our question of why we don't see this ministry operating in more RCA churches.

I have looked at the survey responses and noted a number of responses as they related to the different areas that were delineated. In covering the subject of deliverance ministry, I tried to look at how RCA pastors responded from a number of different vantage points. There was some agreement in response depending on the vantage point from which one looked at the subject. From a pastoral standpoint, it was encouraging to see the heart of the pastors toward the people into whose lives they are called to minister. It was also equally clear from an experiential and theological standpoint that there are some vast differences in how RCA pastors would approach an area such as deliverance ministry. With the five categories listed above and the corresponding responses, let's take a look at what we can draw together from the research up to this point.

Chapter 7

Some Possible Conclusions

When all the telephone interviews were finished, the data that was tabulated and categorized, there appeared to be three main categories that emerged as possible answers to the original question. The original question that I was seeking to answer was, why in the Reformed Church in America, which has a strong history of *sola scriptura*, does the ministry of deliverance rarely, if ever, seem to be actually taking place?

Out of all the responses that were given, I would propose that the following three categories serve as a framework for the remainder of our discussion. Those three are simply, issues of fear or uncertainty, issues of lack of understanding or knowledge, and finally issues of worldview. Let's take a brief look at those individually.

Issues of Fear or Uncertainty

As expressed above, this issue seemed to creep up and be a subtle yet very real influence on why some pastors are not participating in the deliverance ministry. As one pastor said, "there's a great danger in dealing with demonic powers if you don't know what you're doing." This feeling, this attitude, sort of summed up for me this sense that as some have said, "if you leave the devil alone, he'll leave you alone." For someone who has no or very little understanding of the spiritual realm, this statement seems to hold some promise of staying off of evil's radar screen. Is there a legitimacy to this sense of fear, of uncertainty that exists even within ordained pastors? Yes, I believe there is. That legitimacy comes from an understanding, although incomplete, that there is a very real power in the demonic realm. That fear or uncertainty no doubt has some of its roots in what some have read or from the popular media culture that puts out grossly incomplete or unfair pictures of deliverance such as Blatty's, *The Exorcist* (1973). Is there a way to prove that our culture has a greater influence on us than we would like to believe? Yes, but only in general terms. When we look at the Christian culture in other developing countries which have a worldview that embraces the supernatural, we don't see nor hear the fear or uncertainty that seems to be coming from Western pastors. A number of authors have written about these phenomena such as Charles Kraft's excellent book *Christianity with Power* (1989) in which he details his own personal journey in this arena. It is helpful in understanding how to work through and overcome this sense of fear and uncertainty that so often exists within evangelical circles.

This question of fear or uncertainty also seems to point in the direction of how one views Scripture. As 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.” This, at the very least is a good starting point for all of us when confronted with something in the spiritual realm where we feel we may be in ‘over our heads.’ If we start here, we start with a relationship with our Lord that strives toward intimacy with Him. Does this necessarily mean that fears and uncertainties disappear or no longer bother us? No, yet this intimacy can serve as a starting point to know that “greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). Another part of confronting this fear or uncertainty is to be open to exposing oneself to this ministry through people and ministries that you respect. Give yourself the freedom to explore an area that may be unfamiliar to your particular ministry.

The final way that I would propose to engage this area of fear would be to come up with a list of biblically balanced, evangelical teachings or books on the subject of deliverance. Many fears are simply born out of not understanding or having a grasp of the terminology that surrounds a certain subject.

Issues of Knowledge or Understanding

Questions that were geared to understanding RCA pastor’s knowledge or understanding of the ministry of deliverance also showed a wide variety. There were a number of statements as I’ve noted above where the respondents said things such as, “I have an idea” in responding to the question, ‘what would a person need to do . . . to be free’. Another response to the same question, “I’m not sure how that would happen.” When asked the question if spiritual gifts were necessary to minister in the area of deliverance, one pastor noted, “I suppose. . . I’m not convinced deliverance ministry is appropriate and so if I don’t think it’s appropriate, then I don’t think gifts are involved. If it is appropriate, certainly it can’t be done just by anyone.” This answer to me reveals a lack of understanding not only of this particular ministry but also of what Scripture says.

This sense of not understanding or lack of knowledge shows up in many different ways. When asked how they would deal with a person who is manifesting something that could be considered demonic the responses were many and varied. An answer which in many ways was typical, “. . . I wouldn’t know how to deal with it”, reveals not only a lack of experience but a lack of understanding about how Jesus calls us to minister. As Reformed Christians, we believe that Christ gave us the authority to, “make disciples of all nations, baptizing. . . and

teaching them all that I have commanded you. . .” (Mt. 28:19-20). The question that comes to mind is this, how can we possibly teach what Christ taught and did when we are not familiar with it ourselves as pastors? The challenge is not so much to focus in on this area but rather to be at the very least conversant in this area, recognizing that it is an area that comprised roughly 25% of Jesus’ ministry. Do all pastors need to be engaged in the ministry of deliverance? No, but they have been given authority and should be aware of that authority and what that entails. They need to be aware of who, within their own congregations, may be gifted in the areas of discernment, intercessory prayer, words of knowledge and wisdom. An interesting note in regards to the question of the necessity of spiritual gifts was the response of one pastor who noted that, “. . . mercy can drive out a demon, discernment of spirits is helpful, . . . there’s a lot of things, but fundamentally you’re exercising your authority in union with Christ and every believer can exercise that.” That to me is a very solid, biblical understanding of not only spiritual gifts but also what our authority entails in doing ministry in this area.

When confronted, if only hypothetically with someone who is manifesting the demonic, the response, “I wouldn’t know what to make of it” again points to a lack of understanding and knowledge about the demonic and what Jesus did when confronted with the demonic. We would do well to remember that in the gospel of Mark, it was a demon who was the first to recognize who Jesus was at the beginning of His ministry (see Mk. 1:23-26). We need to come to the point where as one pastor said in relating a story about a teen at a camp who was ‘acting up’ simply said, “not having seen this before I just responded like Jesus and Paul did and . . . said in Jesus’ name you’ve got to get out of here and telling whatever it was attacking him, no names, just to get out of there in Christ’s name and I think in that case it was probably more than one, they listened and left.” An interesting side note is that this pastor did not grow up in the church but came to Christ later in life and took what Scripture said at face value!

The question then is how do we raise the level of awareness of this area of the spiritual realm within the church but more importantly within the pastors who serve those churches? One possible way is to bring this area into the seminary curriculum for pastors as they are being trained. Again, let me emphasize, it’s not so all are ready and willing to go out there and engage the demonic but rather to raise the level of awareness of this area. If our pastors are more aware of this area, they will be better equipped to serve those within the congregation should this need arise. Awareness would at least make them open and willing to help the

afflicted person find someone who may be better equipped to deal with whatever is going on in that person's life.

Issues of Worldview

The question of worldview may be the most difficult to sort through and come to grips with. Worldview, as Kraft (1989: 20) puts it is, "the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments underlying a people's perception of REALITY. Worldview is the major influence on how we perceive REALITY." Kraft makes a good argument that in the Western world, we have a much more naturalistic, rationalistic worldview as contrasted with a biblical worldview. When we view the world, there is a certain lens that we view the world through that colors what and how we see the world around us.

Kraft (1989: 27-34) notes several characteristics of our Western worldview in his book *Christianity with Power*. Let me briefly go through those summarizing the main point of each.

1. Our worldview is naturalistic. ". . . unlike most of the peoples of the world, we divide the world into what we call "natural" and what we call "supernatural." And then we largely disregard the supernatural. Our focus is squarely on the natural world, with little or no attention paid to the supernatural world."

2. Materialism dominates Western society. "But we tend to focus on material objects. In our daily life we seek such objects – especially if we feel they will bring us more comfort, more security, more of a cushion against an unfriendly world. Unlike many of the other peoples of the world, we define wealth and poverty purely in material terms. Usually we measure it by the amount of money we have."

3. Western society is humanistic. Since we believe our achievements have come through unaided human effort, we focus on human accomplishments and abilities. . . It is just a matter of time and effort, we believe, before we conquer such-and-such a disease or learn how to control the weather. And if we can just create an organization big and powerful enough to handle the whole world, we will at last have attained peace. . . Our real religion is science, and our priests are the scientists."

4. Reason has become our primary way of understanding REALITY. The key to such developments culminating in our present control over the material universe is the way we have

used our intellects to gain knowledge – knowledge of what we can see, touch, and feel. This knowledge is gained through reason. So Westerners came to seek explanations for all things based on human logic and reason. We call such an approach *rationalism*.

5. We highly value individualism and independence. To us, unlike most contemporary traditional peoples and the biblical Hebrews, the individual is the reality and groups are but abstractions made up of collections of individuals. . . Besides the self-centeredness this engenders and legitimizes, it creates for us a kind of private world within which we are captives, alone and hiding from others. We often experience little real relating to others or to God. . . This determination to “go it alone” also makes both Christian and non-Christians very vulnerable to Satan in the deepest recesses of our being. This is particularly true in emotional areas since we tend to focus so completely on the externals of life in our social relationships.”

6. Westerners do tend to be open to change. Another hopeful aspect of Western worldviews is their openness to change. We have experienced so much that we consider beneficial through changes in life resulting from scientific and technological achievements that we tend to welcome change in most areas of life. Yet Westerners tend to be much more hesitant when it comes to change in religious ideas or allegiances. The feeling seems to be that since so much change is going on in nearly every other area of life, we should keep change in religious traditions to a minimum. This area of life is to prove an anchor, a solid footing, security, and protection from the relativity around us. . . Nevertheless, Western peoples are potentially open to change, even in the area of religion.”

Kraft’s insightfulness into the worldview of our Western society is most helpful to our present topic. In terms of Western society being ‘naturalistic’, how true it is! The interviews which I conducted almost exclusively showed a tendency to look for ‘natural’ reasons behind why a person may be acting out or speaking in other voices. Pastors tend to want to ‘err on the side of grace’ and by this meaning that we don’t want to posit anything that could have a ‘natural’ explanation into the spiritual realm. This is and may be the most prudent course of action living within our society and culture, yet to lean too heavily on this thinking also opens one up to the deceptions of the enemy as well.

The materialistic aspect that Kraft brings up may not have as much bearing on our topic. Yet, in many RCA churches that are struggling to survive, much less grow, one of the reasons behind that is the money in the bank account which they won’t spend for fear of having

nothing left to continue our existence. This sounds a bit harsh but doesn't this same outlook on life fit into what Kraft calls our 'humanistic' mindset? If we can, by our own willpower and intellect keep our struggling churches going, we don't need supernatural intervention and therefore we are not open to what God may want to do not only in the life of our churches but also in our individual lives.

The role of reason in our worldview is far reaching. As Kraft pointed out, we use reason as the lens through which we view REALITY, meaning that which *really is* from a biblical standpoint. It was amazing the amount of times RCA pastors would refer their people to either a Christian therapist or psychologist in lieu of dealing with the situation themselves. Again, this is not to say that God hasn't given us many tools to use in working with and helping people in and through their struggles. The challenge is, why are we so quick to refer to someone 'more qualified' than us when coming to an area such as deliverance? Could it be that even subconsciously we have placed more faith in what the 'science' of psychology can do than what our God can do? The challenge may be to allow what we say we believe to have the freedom to confront us and challenge us in how we view REALITY, as Kraft puts it. Will RCA pastors allow *sola scriptura* to have more influence on how we view the supernatural, how we deal with the supernatural when it suddenly unveils itself in our world? The question of worldview is a huge one when it comes to dealing and working in the area of deliverance ministry.

Kraft's fifth point of description concerning worldviews may actually have more to do with those within our churches than as to why we don't see deliverance happening on a more regular basis in the day to day context of ministry. The point is we live in a culture dominated by individualism and independence, and we as pastors are not immune to this either. If we take that statement as a fact of our culture, is it any wonder that we don't see people coming for ministry in this realm when the culture is screaming at them to deal with it themselves or simply sweep their struggles under the proverbial rug. This individualism and independence no doubt has an impact on pastors when we can say that deliverance is 'not on my radar screens'. How can that be when God's view of the world hasn't changed, the supernatural hasn't changed from a biblical standpoint, and yet we can do and be engaged in ministry without coming into contact with the supernatural on at least a semi-regular basis?

The research that was done points in the direction that a number of the aspects of our Western culture's worldview, as Kraft raised them, appear to have a much greater impact on how we do ministry and view ministry than we may like to admit. In the Reformed tradition we do hold Scripture as authoritative, as being inerrant in all matters of faith and life. The question then is, have we so truncated the supernatural from the natural that even with the above statement about the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, is our faith only applicable to non-natural things such as our spirituality, our faith and how we view God?

In Paul Hiebert's well-known article on worldview entitled *The Flaw of the Excluded Middle* (1982: 35-47), he lays out what he calls '*the Excluded Middle*'. In tracing the course of Western civilization over the last number of centuries, Hiebert notes that, "Religion was brought in to deal with miracles and exceptions to the natural order, but these decreased as scientific knowledge expanded." It appears that for the most part, we have come to the point where we now rely solely on science to explain behavioral abnormalities without resorting to any part of the supernatural.

In a telling survey of Protestant Pastors, George Barna from Barna Research Group notes that according to their recent surveys, (Barna, 2004) only 51% of Senior Pastors nationwide (USA) have what he calls a biblical worldview. Barna bases a biblical worldview on six core beliefs; "the accuracy of biblical teaching, the sinless nature of Jesus, the literal existence of Satan, the omnipotence and omniscience of God, salvation by grace alone, and the personal responsibility to evangelize." Barna argues that, "the low percentage of Christians who have a biblical worldview is a direct reflection of the fact that half of our primary religious teachers and leaders do not have one." One interesting note is that according to his research, only 28% of pastors in mainline denominations have a biblical worldview! The RCA is typically included among 'mainline' churches in the United States.

The challenge is that it is one thing to answer a survey about questions of worldview and even answer according to a biblical worldview and a whole other matter to actually see that worldview lived out in the ebb and flow of everyday ministry. Now, let's turn and look ahead in regards to the Reformed Church in America and the ministry of deliverance and ask, where do we go from here, what is the next step?

Chapter 8

Some Next Steps

As I began this work, I noted numerous ways that the ministry of deliverance has come to the forefront, at least in the United States. There have been numerous movies made around the theme of the supernatural, the occult, the demonic, many simply exploiting it or sensationalizing yet still raising the awareness in our culture. I noted that there have been several news specials done on the theme of deliverance which noted and commented on several deliverance ministries which currently exist in the United States. I have quoted briefly from a very, very brief selection of the plethora of books that have been and are being written in the area of deliverance ministry and spiritual warfare. I have looked briefly at some of the confusion that exists around terminology as it relates the area of deliverance ministry.

The question that comes to mind is this, with all this happening in our culture, with the advent of the post-modernity with its correlating rise in the interest of spirituality, why does so little appear to be happening in terms of the area of deliverance within the context of the Reformed Church in America? Where do we go from here? How does one go about raising an awareness of and in so doing, laying to rest the fears and uncertainties that exist around this issue of the demonic and deliverance? What is the most effective way to raise the level of awareness and knowledge about the subject of deliverance, putting it well within the context of Reformed theology so that those within the Reformed Church in America can hear and ‘grab hold’ of it to use as a tool in ministry? Maybe, most importantly, how do we bring about changes in our worldviews so that the RCA’s worldview is more in line with a biblical, supernatural worldview? There are a number of possible trajectories that we could begin to look at to try and address these issues as they present themselves.

A key way that could begin to be used is simply to develop some materials that would speak into a conservative, Reformed context that addresses the areas of spiritual warfare, demonology as best we understand it, the authority we have in Christ and what that means to us in the daily work of ministry. We need to learn from what is out there already and is working and learn from them. Organizations, such as Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International, are already working to bring the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit into the more conservative Reformed context.

Another way to help shed light on this and raise an awareness of not only this specific topic of deliverance, but all that the Lord would have for us in the arena of healing, spiritual gifts, spiritual warfare, discerning the voice of the Spirit, would be to begin putting material together that could be used for not only the training of new pastors but also for the Sunday School curricula within our churches. It's interesting that most people within our churches will follow for the most part where the pastor leads, not only in terms of what they hear but, maybe more importantly, what they see lived out before them. Can we begin raising up our children with an awareness of the supernatural, of reading the Word of God, believing what it says and going out and doing it? In my limited experience in working with churches, lay people are generally more open to grappling with these issues than their pastors.

The question of how to go about changing worldviews is a much more difficult one to answer. As Barna (2004) says, “. . . people do not get a biblical worldview simply by regularly attending church. A biblical worldview must be both taught and caught – that is, it has to be explained and modeled.” Another challenge that Barna's research brings up is that according to his research, pastors who are seminary educated are least likely to have a biblical worldview. Contrast this with the fact that, “three out of five pastors who have not attended seminary operate with a biblical worldview” (Barna, 2004). This is a fascinating fact especially in light of the fact that one of the key underpinnings of Reformed clergy and tradition is to have a ‘trained, educated’ clergy. The RCA has entire programs set up to ensure that all of its’ pastors, no matter if they attend an RCA seminary or not have been grounded in the basics of Reformed tradition, polity, history and worship. Currently, there is no avenue for a non-trained person who may be gifted as a pastor, operating as a pastor to become a full-fledged ordained pastor within the RCA.

The obvious question for me that begs to be asked is this, exactly what are we teaching our upcoming pastors in our seminaries? Are they being taught a biblical worldview? Has the ‘naturalistic, humanistic, rationalistic, individualistic worldview of the West been transplanted even into our seminaries? I have no way of knowing definitively but I would venture that the answer would be yes, it has infiltrated even our higher educational systems within the church. So with that in mind, what does one do?

I would suggest possibly the following to begin addressing all the issues. Begin by finding out what is happening out there within the Reformed context in all its shapes and forms.

Begin networking those pastors who are working in this area with those who would be interested or have questions that could be answered from a Reformed pastor as opposed to someone from a more charismatic or Pentecostal tradition. Look at finding ways to hold seminars, to have opportunities to teach, to begin opening up the doors to the possibilities of what God may want to do in and through part of His body called the Reformed Church in America. Begin telling the stories of those who have been set free, not to highlight the person but to highlight that, “Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). We live in what is being called the ‘postmodern’ or as some have said of the West, the post-Christian era. We live in a generation that is a story-telling generation. Let’s begin telling the stories of how lives have been changed, transformed by not only the power of the gospel, but also by the power and work of the Holy Spirit as He works through us to see people set free.

I believe more research is called for to better delineate the issues that prevent the ministry of deliverance from operating in the RCA. This would include discerning what is being taught within our seminaries (the RCA has two seminaries, Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI and New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey) in regards to the supernatural realm. This would again be along the lines of qualitative research because it would be imperative to ‘enter in’ to the realm that pastors are operating in, in order to try to discern and discover ways of working through and raising an awareness of this topic. This research would also probably need to include not only telephone interviews but mostly in-depth personal live interviews with pastors or groups of pastors.

Is there hope for deliverance ministry within the boundaries of the RCA? I believe there is reason for great hope to see this ministry renewed and restored within our Reformed contexts. Many pastors were, at the very least, open to learning, discussing and growing in this area. Many pastors have had some contact with the ministry and some were engaged in deliverance on a more regular basis. Let’s learn from them, what works, what doesn’t and how to best be the very presence of Christ in a lost and dying world. I find it interesting that Jesus taught His disciples ‘how to pray’ but he modeled to them the ministry of deliverance. And a cursory reading of the gospel accounts will show that there were a number of different ways that Jesus dealt with the demonic realm. Let’s allow that creativity, that freedom that Jesus showed to deal with the demonic to have a place in how we come to model and live out the commands of Christ to be His disciples in our current world and culture. Finally, as those

coming from a Reformed tradition, let us always be *semper reformada*, reformed and ever reforming according to the Word of God!

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Endnotes

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- ⁱ For more information on Cornerstone Christian Counseling Centre, see their website at: <http://www.cornerstonechristian.ca> . I have had some training with Rev. Art Zeilstra who runs Cornerstone who is an RCA pastor in Ontario, Canada.
- ⁱⁱ For more information on Doris Wagner, see Global Harvest Ministries website at: www.globalharvestministries.org/index.asp?action=doris I had the privilege of hearing Doris speak when she taught one day during a week long intensive while I was Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA.
- ⁱⁱⁱ For more information on Don Dickerman Ministries, see his website at: www.dondickerman.com
- ^{iv} For more information on Bob Larson Ministries or his schedule, see his website at: www.bobl Larson.org
- ^v For more information on Ray of Hope Ministries, see their website at: www.rayofhopeministries.com
- ^{vi} For more information on PRMI, see their website at: www.primi.org Brad has also co-authored several books. Long, Zeb Bradford and McMurry, Douglas, *The Collapse of the Brass Heaven*, Chosen Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1994, *Receiving the Power*, Chosen Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1996., & Long, Brad and Strickler, Cindy, *Let Jesus Heal Your Hidden Wounds*, Chosen Books, Grand Rapids, MI 2001
- ^{vii} For more information on Healing Rooms see the website at: www.healingrooms.com For further information on the Healing Rooms of Tulare. CA see: www.healingroomstulare.com
- ^{viii} The Children's Bread can be contacted at: The Children's Bread, P.O. Box 789, Plainview, TX 79073 or through the web at: www.thechildrensbread.net
- ^{ix} Fountain of Freedom Ministries can be contacted at:: 3610 West Victory Boulevard, Burbank CA 91505
- ^x Cleansing Stream Ministries can be contacted at: www.cleansingstream.org or 800-580-8190.
- ^{xi} For a complete listing of all the speakers at the Theology Strategy Working Group and the Intercessory Working Group held in Nairobi, Kenya during August 2000, see the website at: www.gospelcom.net/lcwe/dufe/program.htm