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# **‘Physicians of the Soul’: Clerical Responses to Demonic Temptation and Possession in Early Modern Reformed English Protestant Theology**

Brendan C. Walsh

*Recent scholarship has highlighted the centrality of demonic temptation (to commit sin) in early modern Reformed English Protestantism. This article develops this argument further by examining the manifestation of, and the clerical response to, demonic possession in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. Demonic possession is framed here as an expression of intense conflict with demonic temptation: a reading that emphasises the spiritual effects of this affliction on the soul. Moreover, it presents English clergymen—particularly those of Puritan convictions—as predominantly concerned with treating the effects of demonic temptation on the soul. In this role, they thereby fashioned themselves as ‘physicians of the soul’. Through examining a range of early modern English works of practical divinity, demonology, and demonic possession, this article establishes the broader ‘Godly’ concern with demonic temptation, along with how this concern shaped their conceptualisation of demonic assault and spiritual healing.*

## **I. Introduction**

In early 1573, Alexander Nyndge of Herringswell (Suffolk) was struck down by an inexplicable malady. The boy lashed out in fierce convulsions with seemingly superhuman strength, his body disfigured and contorted beyond its natural form. A lump bulged out from beneath his skin, periodically travelling up and down his body. Edward Nyndge soon determined that his younger brother was possessed by a demonic spirit. This spirit proceeded to assail the boy with temptations, offering to end the torments if he acquiesced. Taking responsibility for his brother’s treatment, Edward challenges the spirit ‘to tell us the cause of his cominge, and why he did torme[n]t his brother, to the which the Spirit answered. I come for his soule’.<sup>1</sup> This possession narrative typifies the central role of tempter that the Devil played in Calvinist theology, establishing his ability to violate both body and soul.<sup>2</sup> Emphasising New Testament representations of Satan, Calvinists recast

<sup>1</sup> *A Booke Declaringe the Fearfull Vexation, of One Alexander Nyndge: Beynge moste Horriblye Tormented wyth an euyll Spirit. The xx. daie of Januarie. In the yere of our Lorde 1573. At Lyeringswell in Suffolke* (London, 1573), sig. A3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> By Calvinists, this article denotes Protestants that subscribed to the doctrine of double predestination.

him as a figure whose primary objective was tempting individuals to forfeit their soul and salvation through committing sin. Richard Greenham, an influential sixteenth-century English clergyman, neatly summarises this realignment: ‘the diuell whilst he was made knowne to men onely by hornes, by clawes, or by an hollow voyce, was wonderfully feared; but now being reuealed to be a more secret aduersarie, a spirituall tempter, a priuie ouerthrower of the soule’.<sup>3</sup> The perception that Satan could possess the soul, Brian Levack explains, ‘was consistent with the Calvinist belief in a spiritual devil whose main activity was temptation’, and the foremost concern in such possession cases was if the demoniac would succumb to these demonic ploys.<sup>4</sup> Catholic theology maintained that humanity was only ‘contaminated’ with sin after the Fall, meaning that the soul remained under God’s protection unless an individual surrendered it, whereas the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity removed any such caveats.<sup>5</sup> The ‘dominion of sinne’, writes Jean Calvin in *The Institution of Christian Religion*, ‘doothe not onely reigne in all mankind, but also wholly possesseth euerye soule’.<sup>6</sup> This realignment profoundly affected the Reformed Protestant interpretation of diabolic agency and necessitated a different pastoral approach in resisting demonic assault. The Calvinist emphasis on the Devil as a tempter, along with the development of clerical responses to this threat in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, offers profound insights into the nature of English demonism during this period, and these concerns are explored throughout this article.

The healing of souls was a fundamental consideration across all Christian denominations, but found prominence in Reformed spiritualities. Amongst the Church of England clergy, the most zealous ministers—those of a ‘Puritan’ or ‘Godly’ persuasion—demonstrated the most interest in this vocation.<sup>7</sup> These

<sup>3</sup> Richard Greenham, ‘Graue Counsels, and Godly Observations: serving generally to direct all men in the waies of true godliness: but principally applyed to instruct, and comfort all afflicted con|sciencs’, in *The workes of the reuerend and faithfull seruant of Iesus Christ M. Richard Greenham, minister and preacher of the Word of God collected into one volume: reuised, corrected, and published, for the further building of all such as loue the truth, and desire to know the power of godliness* (London, 1612), pp. 1–70 (p. 37).

<sup>4</sup> Brian P. Levack, *The Devil Within: Possession & Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 161, 211.

<sup>5</sup> As the thirteenth-century Franciscan Saint Bonaventure explains in the second volume of his *Commentaries on the Four Books of Sentences*, ‘Daemones animabus humanis illabi nequeunt’: ‘The demons are unable to slip into human souls’. St. Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi* (New York: College of St. Bonaventure, 1885), II., 224 (commentary on 2.8.2.1).

<sup>6</sup> Jean Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, vvyrtten in Latine by maister Ihon Caluin, and translated into Englysh according to the authors last edition. Seen and allowed according to the order appointed in the *Quenes maiesties iniunctions*, trans. Thomas Norton (London, 1561), p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> The usage of the term ‘Puritan’ remains a contentious scholarly issue, as it was originally employed as a slur against individuals deemed to be overzealous in their religious convictions. These individuals called themselves the ‘Godly’. Puritan and Godly are defined here in the Collinson mould as the ‘hotter sort of Protestants’, using the descriptive markers provided by Michael P. Winship. Puritans were the staunchest defenders of England’s fledgling

individuals were the most active in advocating 'practical divinity', a unique form of pastoral care that was developed in the late sixteenth century to heal afflicted souls.<sup>8</sup> This amounted to a concerted attempt by the English clergy to recover their role as mediators between parishioners and the divine which had been undermined by the Reformation.<sup>9</sup> Godly clergymen thereby modelled themselves after Christ as 'physicians of the soul', curing individuals suffering under the influence of the Devil.<sup>10</sup> William Perkins, the most prolific Puritan writer of this period, provides this characterisation:

spirituall men, especially the holy men of God, and ministers of his word, are the Lords surgeans, to bind vp the broken, and raise those that are fallen: as also his physitiens; to restore those that are in a spirituall consumption of grace: we ought to make great account of them, & haue them in singular love, for their worke sake.<sup>11</sup>

This Godly archetype of the spiritual physician was not simply a passive one, though. They also envisioned themselves as warriors of God, fiercely resisting the Devil's attempts to corrupt the soul through temptation.

The state of the soul was of most interest to Calvinists precisely because it was at this site that the struggle with demonic temptation unfolded. As Nathan Johnstone argues in *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England*, conflict with the demonic in Reformed Protestantism was centred on the concept of temptation, as theologians elevated this into the single most important aspect of satanic activity. This elevation did not involve any sort of explicit demonological reform, but was predicated on a subtle realignment of emphasis that moved away from a systematic understanding of the Devil's agency to an all-encompassing one centred on individual conflict.<sup>12</sup> The Calvinist paradigm of temptation, according to Darren Oldridge, was an exceptionally flexible psychological recourse that allowed individuals to make sense of spiritual difficulties and configure them into

Protestantism, the most determined seekers of salvation, the most concerned with God's providence, and the most committed activists for moral and spiritual reform. Notably, Puritans in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century were far more ingrained in the broader spiritual culture than their counterparts from the Civil War and Restoration periods. Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Cape, 1967); Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> The cure or care of souls (*cura animarum*) traditionally referred to the duty of the clergy to minister to a parish or congregation.

<sup>9</sup> Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 95–96.

<sup>10</sup> Michael MacDonald, 'Religion, Social Change, and Psychological Healing in England, 1600–1800', *Studies in Church History*, 19 (1982), 101–25 (p. 103).

<sup>11</sup> William Perkins and Rafe Cudworth, *A Commentarie Or Exposition, vpon the fve first Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians: penned by the godly, learned, and Judiciall Diuine, M. W. Perkins. Now published for the benefit of the Church, and continued with a Supplement vpon the sixt Chapter, by Rafe Cvdworth Bachelour of Diuinitie* (Cambridge, 1604), p. 464.

<sup>12</sup> Johnstone, pp. 1–2, 61.

the larger providential schema.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, perpetual conflict against demonic temptation was a fundamental aspect of spiritual warfare, a duty that all good Christians were required to enthusiastically fulfill.<sup>14</sup> Demonic possession stands as the most visceral form of temptation, manifesting this spiritualised notion of demonic influence as a physical affliction. One possession pamphlet explains that ‘*the diuel* is not to be understood onely [by] the temptations of the Diuel, but euen [by] Sathans verie person’.<sup>15</sup> This was an experience that brought the constant inner battle with temptation to the surface in an overtly dramatic fashion for others to witness and participate in. English theologians thus preached to their flocks on the need for constant vigilance and self-examination, as the Devil was always ready to creep into one’s thoughts or ambush them during a vulnerable state.<sup>16</sup> In instances of exceptional demonic vexation, they provided spiritual healing through dispossession (exorcism). Protestant dispossession, as a distinct form of spiritual healing, was therefore predicated on cleansing the body and soul of demonic temptation.<sup>17</sup>

The development of clerical dispossession in England was profoundly shaped by confessional rivalries and ecclesiastical politics.<sup>18</sup> During this period exorcism became a powerful vehicle for proselytisation, as was evident in controversies such as the 1565–66 ‘Miracle of Laon’ or the 1585–86 Jesuit-led exorcisms at Denham (Buckinghamshire).<sup>19</sup> Catholics clearly had a distinct advantage in the propaganda war, and their successful exorcistic rituals served as markers of the ‘true’ faith.<sup>20</sup> Protestant dispossession thereby developed to counter Roman Catholic claims of supremacy, providing English clergymen with a viable form of spiritual healing. However, the validity of dispossession subsequently came under fierce ecclesiastical scrutiny, exemplified by the controversy over John Darrell’s exorcism ministry. In 1599, Puritan minister John Darrell was sensationally convicted by the London High Commission for carrying out fraudulent

<sup>13</sup> Darren Oldridge, *The Devil in Tudor and Stuart England* (Stroud: History Press, 2010), p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Frank Luttmer, ‘Prosecutors, Tempters and Vassals of the Devil: The Unregenerate in Puritan Practical Divinity,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51.1 (2000), 37–68 (p. 46).

<sup>15</sup> Jesse Bee and others. *The Most Wonderfull and True Storie, of a Certaine Witch Named Also Gooderige of Stapenhill, Who Was Arraigned and Convicted at Darbie at the Assises There. As Also a True Report of the Strange Torments of Thomas Darling, a Boy of Thirteene Years of Age, That Was Possessed of the Deuill, with His Horrible Fittes and Terrible Apparitions by Him Uttered at Burton Upon Trent in the County of Stafford, and of His Marvellous Deliverance* (London, 1597), p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Michelle D. Brock, ‘Internalizing the Demonic: Satan and the Self in Early Modern Scottish Piety,’ *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (2015), 23–43 (p. 29).

<sup>17</sup> Levack, pp. 111–12.

<sup>18</sup> MacDonald, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> For a scholarly exploration of the ‘Miracle of Laon’, see Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2004); for an examination of the ‘Devils of Denham’ case, see F. W. Brownlow, *Shakespeare, Harsnett, and the Devils of Denham* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Levack, pp. 110–11.

exorcisms.<sup>21</sup> The bishops fronting this commission—John Whitgift and Richard Bancroft—along with Bancroft's chaplain Samuel Harsnett, were sceptical of post-apostolic demonic possession and witchcraft, perceiving dispossession as a threat to their authority. This controversy only further inflamed tensions within the Church of England, as many Puritans harnessed print to defend their brethren, resulting in a substantial body of demonological publications that, in turn, elicited further responses. However, this support did not equate to a complete endorsement of dispossession.<sup>22</sup> Godly clergymen were adamant that it was their duty to lead the battle against demonic temptation, yet some believed that the correct response to exceptional cases was to patiently bear it and pray that the Devil would ultimately be constrained by God.<sup>23</sup> Dispossession was but one clerical response to demonic temptation enacted by English Calvinists in this period, and the orthodoxy of this practice was actively being shaped by overarching ecclesiastical and confessional concerns.

This article develops Nathan Johnstone's thesis of demonic temptation as the central aspect of satanic agency in English Protestantism by exploring how this paradigm shaped demonic possession and the clerical response to this phenomenon. To this effect, it conceptualises demonic possession as a manifestation of individual conflict with temptation, and dispossession as a form of clerical mediation aimed at resisting these temptations. This article thus reconciles demonic possession with the broader Calvinist conception of demonic temptation. Johnstone summarises that this theological construction of demonic possession is well established in the primary sources, but due to a lack of scholarly consideration, requires emphasising.<sup>24</sup> It has only been in the last few decades, driven by Stuart Clark's transformative *Thinking with Demons*, that demonic possession has begun to be studied as a predominantly spiritual phenomenon, rather than strictly a physical one.<sup>25</sup> Clark established that possession in the early modern period was perceived as an emblematic condition in which the physical torments of the possessed individual offered profound providential, soteriological, and eschatological meanings.<sup>26</sup> Following in this vein, Brian Levack has made large strides in contextualising the spiritual and cultural dimensions of demonic possession with his 2013 monograph *The Devil Within*. However, much more

<sup>21</sup> See Brendan C. Walsh, *The English Exorcist: John Darrell and the Shaping of Early Modern English Protestant Demonology* (London: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> Francis Young, *A History of Anglican Exorcism: Deliverance and Demonology in Church Ritual* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018), p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Johnstone, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> Johnstone, p. 102.

<sup>25</sup> Clark's scholarship is built on the work of D. P. Walker, who brought to light the connection between possession and religious polemic in early modern society. D. P. Walker, *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

<sup>26</sup> Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 419–22.

work needs to be done to explore the distinctive Calvinist conceptualisation of this affliction. One primary reason that this area has evaded scholarly attention for so long is that demonic possession occupied a secondary place in the Protestant schema of demonic assaults, meaning that dispossession was only a minor theme in Puritan spiritual warfare.<sup>27</sup> Even during the high-water mark of demonic possession in early modern England—the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—the number of recorded cases was relatively minor compared to that of continental Europe.<sup>28</sup> Finally, exorcism was a contentious matter for the English clergy, so much so that the ecclesiastical authorities restricted the use of dispossession in the early seventeenth century. Nevertheless, demonic possession was prevalent enough in this period that it received a substantial amount of attention from Calvinist theologians. There are many demonological treatises and pamphlets published at this time that vividly establish exactly how demonic possession was conceptualised as a struggle with temptation, and such works are used here to illustrate the centrality of temptation in English Protestantism.

The works examined in this article are drawn from a range of interconnected early modern print genres, including practical divinity, demonology, and demonic possession pamphlets. This cross-generic approach highlights the broader Godly concern with demonic temptation, along with how this concern shaped the conceptualisation of demonic possession. An examination of these different genres also establishes an ongoing tension in the religious culture of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England concerning the nature of the Devil's physicality and his interactions with humanity.<sup>29</sup> Overall, these works and the generic formats that they represent provide a unique insight into the realignment of emphasis taking place in English demonology during this period. The genre of practical divinity, in particular, is examined here in detail, as it was intertwined with Puritan piety and offered pastoral instruction for resisting temptation. 'The vast bulk of Puritan sermons and treatises', explains Frank Luttmer, 'were works of "practical divinity", didactic and exhortative works intended to be of immediate and practical use to Christian audiences seeking spiritual guidance'.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the methods advocated in these works for renouncing Satan were nearly identical to those outlined in dispossession accounts.<sup>31</sup> Demonic possession pamphlets therefore shared characteristics with the practical divinity genre, as their implicit function was to illustrate the providential purpose of this affliction along with the required response, in a format that was readily accessible to a broad audience. The spiritual

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Sweeney, 'Reformed Demonology: The Theology and Practice of Spiritual Warfare in English Puritanism' (unpublished master's thesis, McMaster Divinity College, 2011), p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> In 1600, it is possible to identify only twenty-five demoniacs across England (out of a population of four million) that lived in communities where Calvinism flourished. Levack, p. 261.

<sup>29</sup> Levack, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Luttmer, p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> Oldridge, p. 150.

remedy offered in these works, while encouraging sufferers to engage in sustained self-reflection, was far more decisive in nature, though. What emerges from these different types of publications is a variety of experiential clerical approaches in treating demonic affliction. Puritan ministers fashioned themselves as spiritual physicians, but some wanted access to even more powerful tools, such as dispossession. The clergy were actively redefining their spiritual responsibilities in this period, and this article outlines how the Calvinist consideration of demonic temptation profoundly shaped the manifestation of, and the clerical response to, diabolic assault.

## II. Demonic Temptation

Demonic temptation, enacted through the *world* or the *flesh*, was an overarching condition that every individual experienced in their daily lives. Temptation was a concern across all Christian denominations, but the Godly professed a fascination with this condition not echoed to the same degree in contemporaneous theological works. This was because the fallen nature of humans established that they would always be vulnerable to a cunning enemy whose favoured weapon was temptation. Furthermore, it was expected that every individual would be subjected to demonic assault during their lifetime. In *The Combat Betweene Christ and the Diuell Displayed*, Perkins establishes that 'satan is called the *Tempter*, because his continuall studie and practise hath beene and is, by all meanes to tempt all men; he omits no times, neither spares any paines day or night, but by all meanes seekes to draw men from God, and to bring them to destruction'.<sup>32</sup> Satan's temptations, in the words of sixteenth-century physician and clergyman Timothy Bright, 'are either by corporall possession, or with more liberty and freedome to the tempted'.<sup>33</sup> However, such demonic assaults were taken with the knowledge that God had ordained them. In his 1597 *Daemonologie*, King James VI refers to the Devil as 'Gods hang-man', the instrument through which the Lord enacts his divine will.<sup>34</sup> Temptation was thus cast as a fundamental aspect of God's providential scheme, perpetually testing and sanctifying the pious individual. Greenham encourages Christians to recognise their internal afflictions as a form of divine testing designed to strengthen the soul against demonic influence.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the late sixteenth-century Puritan preacher George Gifford, invoking James 1.12, writes in his 1593 demonological treatise: 'As if thou feare God, and Satan afflict thee, stand fast in faith and patience, and waite vpon God for thy deliuerance. If thou endure

<sup>32</sup> William Perkins, *The Combat Betweene Christ and the Diuell Displayed: Or A Commentarie Vpon the Temptations of Christ: Preached in Cambridge by that reuerend and iudicious diuine M. William Perkins* (London, 1606), p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie. Containing the causes thereof, & reasons of the strange effects it worketh in our minds and bodies: with the physicke cure, and spirituall consolation for such as haue thereto adoynd an afflicted conscience* (London, 1586), p. 208.

<sup>34</sup> James VI, King of Scotland, *Daemonologie, in Forme of a Dialogue, Diuided into Three Bookes* (Edinburgh, 1597), p. 5 (Preface).

<sup>35</sup> Greenham, p. 38.

temptation, thou art blessed, and shalt be crowned'.<sup>36</sup> Michelle Brock, in her work on Scottish Calvinism, characterises this providential type of self-reflection as 'internalizing the demonic'. Individuals in Calvinist communities 'conceived of themselves primarily as deserving recipients of intrusions and assaults by Satan' with 'the recognition of sinfulness and even the self-identification as evil serv[ing] as preconditions for submission to God'.<sup>37</sup> *The Combat Betweene Christ and the Diuell Displayed* exemplifies this sentiment, with Perkins exclaiming 'when we are tossed and tried by manifold temptations, we must not thinke it strange, but rather count it [an] exceeding great ioy [...] because it is Gods blessed will and ordinance that Satan and euery Christian should enter combat and conflict, for the triall of his graces in them'.<sup>38</sup> Thus, rather than attempting to avoid the inevitable, the Godly fashioned humanity's endless struggle with temptation into a process of spiritual reflection and sanctification. Perpetual conflict with demonic temptation therefore provided an eschatological, spiritual, and cultural framework through which to contextualise the phenomenon of demonic possession.

Temptation was a distinctly broad condition, manifesting as a subtle desire, a pervasive influence, or a full-on assault on the moral and spiritual faculties of the individual. The exact nature of diabolic affliction was something of a grey area in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Calvinist theology as adherents grappled with reconciling pre-Reformation conceptions of the Devil as a physical tormenter with an emerging emphasis on his role as a spiritual tempter.<sup>39</sup> This reconciliation process also forced English Calvinists into a fraught accommodation with surviving popular beliefs in areas such as witchcraft and possession.<sup>40</sup> 'Belief in the physical manifestation of Satan', Johnstone writes, 'was difficult for Protestants to resist because it was both deeply entrenched in popular culture and could be attuned to reformist agendas'.<sup>41</sup> A muddled interpretation of demonic assault thus emerged from this confluence, blurring demonological categories, and perpetuating a conception of the Devil which operated on both the spiritual and physical planes. The main distinction that Calvinist demonologists put forth was between *outward* and *inward* diabolic assaults, approximately equivalent to demonic *obsession* and *possession*.<sup>42</sup> King James's *Daemonologie* outlines that

<sup>36</sup> George Gifford, *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes. In which is laide open how craftely the Diuell deceiueh not onely the Witches but many other and so leadeth them awrie into many great error* (London, 1593), sig. H3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Brock, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> Perkins, *Combat Betweene Christ and the Diuell*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> The corporeality of demons was debated at length during this period, with the common consensus being that they possessed invisible spiritual bodies that were able to assume different forms and interact with the physical plane. For a detailed study of this corporeality debate, see Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> Oldridge, pp. 160–61.

<sup>41</sup> Johnstone, pp. 75–76.

<sup>42</sup> Levack, p. 16. Demonic obsession, denoting an *external yet internally directed* type of demonic assault resulting in afflictions such as 'ungodly motions, affections, lustes [...] and

the former 'followes outwardlie': constituting an external attack on the mind, soul, or body through visions or illusions, and the latter 'possesses inwardlie the persones that they trouble': meaning that the demon has penetrated the corporeal form and assumed control of its faculties.<sup>43</sup> Perkins maps this schema specifically to temptation in explaining that 'The Diuell in tempting a man to sin, first conuayes into his minde, either by inward suggestion, or by outward object, the motion or cogitation of that sinne which he would haue him to commit'.<sup>44</sup> A further demarcation is that between a *corporeal* and a *spiritual* possession. The corporeally possessed were those demoniacs featured in the Bible, whereas the spiritually possessed are apostates, in whom the Devil does not physically dwell but rather corrupts externally.<sup>45</sup>

Complicating matters further was the prevalence of witchcraft in English possession cases, usually functioning as the catalyst for the entire ordeal. Satan was thought to enact his malice through witches, using them to cast demonic spirits into individuals. Calvinist demonology also configured malefic acts within this paradigm of demonic temptation, designating witches as 'the most pernicious enemy of our saluation, the most effectuall instrument of destroying our soules'.<sup>46</sup> Evidently, there was a lot of overlap between these different forms of demonic assault, and this indicates that a well-defined typology of temptation was not present in English theology at this time. The familiar biblical examples of Eve's

carnall practices', was formally introduced into English spiritual discourse by Puritan ministers John Deacon and John Walker in their treatise *Dialogicall Discourses* (1601). This demonological category is derived from the Latin *obsessio* (a siege), relating to the verb *obsidere* (to surround). However, its linguistic foundations are unstable, as Latin texts often used terms such as *obsessis* or *obsessas* when denoting possession. As forwarded in Deacon and Walker's treatises, obsession was an entirely naturalistic explanation for diabolic influence: a total reconceptualisation of demonic possession. A demon could not occupy the body or soul in a corporeal sense, they argued, but it could still tempt humans through obsession. Obsession became an established, yet contested, category of demonic assault in the opening period of the seventeenth century. John Deacon and John Walker, *Dialogicall Discourses of Spirits and Diuels Declaring Their Proper Essence, Natures, Dispositions, and Operations, Their Possessions and Dispossessions: With Other the Appendantes, Peculiarly Appertaining to Those Speciall Points, Verie Conducent, and Pertinent to the Timely Procuring of Some Christian Conformitie in Iudgement, for the Peaceable Compounding of the Late Sprong Controuersies Concerning All Such Intricate and Difficult Doubts* (London, 1601), pp. 226–27.

<sup>43</sup> James VI, p. 62.

<sup>44</sup> Perkins, *Combat Betweene Christ and the Diuell*, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Harman Bhogal, 'Rethinking Demonic Possession: The Impact of the Debates about the Darrell Case on Later Demonological Thought, with Particular Reference to John Deacon and John Walker', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 2013), p. 302. Perkins explains that the latter is exemplified by the 'first Adam', who 'was tempted and ouercome therein; Satan preuailed in that conflict, and brings him captiue into his kingdome, hauing spiritually taken possession of him'. Perkins, *Combat Betweene Christ and the Diuell*, p. 49.

<sup>46</sup> William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft; So Farre Forth as It Is Reuealed in the Scriptures, and Manifest by True Experience. Framed and Deliuered by M. William Perkins, in His Ordinarie Course of Preaching, and Now Published by Tho. Pickering Batchelour of Diuinitie, and Minister of Finchfield in Essex. Whereunto Is Adioyned a Twofold Table; One of the Order and Heades of the Treatise; Another of the Texts of Scripture Explained, or Vindicated from the Corrupt Interpretation of the Aduersarie* (Cambridge, 1610), p. 177.

fall to temptation and Christ's combat with the Devil in the desert were cited by Calvinist theologians as potential models of framing demonic temptation.<sup>47</sup> Yet, interpretations of these temptations were far from settled, as these scriptural passages did not offer a singular notion of the Devil's physicality nor the exact means in which he assaulted individuals.<sup>48</sup> Demonic possession in the Calvinist tradition did not map neatly onto any one model of temptation and, in fact, seemed to encompass aspects from all of these biblical examples. Possession was both a physical and a spiritual affliction that emphasised the extensive power that Satan held over humanity. Under the influence of the Devil or a demonic spirit, demoniacs were driven to commit all manner of blasphemies, and further torments ensued if they failed to resist the temptations pressed upon them. To this effect, demonic possession was certainly the most dynamic form of demonic assault in this context.

The torments inflicted by the Devil, while harrowing, were only a means to obtain the soul and cast it into hellfire. Any weakness present within an individual provided demonic entities with a foothold inside the body from which this spirit could possess the soul. Satan, according to Perkins, 'afficteth [*sic*] and tormenteth the body for the gaine of the soule'.<sup>49</sup> The exact mechanics of spirit possession is difficult to quantify in Reformed Protestantism, but soul possession was formulated, by some theologians, as analogous to corporeal possession. John Darrell explains that 'the diuel may possesse the soule of man, as well as his body'.<sup>50</sup> Satan could thereby occupy the soul (while not having full control over it) and slowly break down the individual's spiritual defences. Naturally, this was his favoured tactic. 'If Satan [*is*] so diligent [...] in compassinge an entrance into the body', Darrell muses, 'will he vse no diligence and take no paines, for the winedinge of himselfe into the soules of men? Yes verily' as 'by so much more desyreth he the possessinge of mans soule and continuance therein, which leadeth thervnto, aboue the corporall possession'.<sup>51</sup> Demonic forces entered the soul through an opening in the body: a phenomenon that was both *literal* and *metaphorical*. Certainly, this was the act of a demon penetrating the human body,

<sup>47</sup> Sweeney, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup> Johnstone, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> Perkins, *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft*, p. 176.

<sup>50</sup> John Darrell, *A Suruey of Certaine Dialogical Discourses: VVritten by Iohn Deacon, and Iohn Walker, Concerning the Doctrine of the Possession and Dispossession of Diuels Vvherein Is Manifested the Palpable Ignorance and Dangerous Errors of the Discourers, and What According to Proportion of God His Truth, Every Christian Is to Hold in These Poyntes* (n.p., 1602), p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> John Darrell, 'The Doctrin of the Possession and Dispossession of Demonoiakes Out of the Word of God. Particularly Applied Vnto Somers, and the Rest of the Persons Controverted Together. With the use we are make of the same', in *A True Narration of the Strange and Greuous Vexation by the Devil, of 7. Persons in Lancashire, and VVilliam Sommers of Nottingham Wherein the Doctrine of Possession and Dispossession of Demoniakies out of the Word of God Is Particularly Appliyed Vnto Sommers, and the Rest of the Persons Controuerted: Togeather with the Vse We Are to Make of These Workes of God* (n.p., 1600), p. 82.

but it also illustrated internal conflict with temptation. During the Lancashire Seven case (1596–97), for example, a household of demoniacs was infected by one 'cunning man' actually *breathing* (through kisses) 'the Devil into their bodies'; a quite literal depiction of possession.<sup>52</sup> Throughout the 1597–98 possession of William Sommers (in Nottingham), on the other hand, the Devil appeared before the young man in '*the likenes of a Ratte*' and offered riches if permitted to crawl into his mouth.<sup>53</sup> This visitation encapsulates both the physical and spiritual dimensions of demonic assault, exemplifying how temptation was a fundamental aspect of many English possession cases. Temptation—either the catalyst for a spiritual trial, or itself a spiritual trial that began once the demon was within the individual—thus profoundly shaped how demonic possession manifested in this period.

Possession narratives were therefore predicated on communicating the vulnerability of every individual to demonic assault, exemplifying the torments that followed once a demonic spirit assumed control of a human vessel. Possession was a spiritual experience in which the sinfulness of the demoniac manifested in an outward display of suffering designed to be discerned and responded to.<sup>54</sup> Demoniacs were thus living examples of the Devil's influence in that they depicted the destructive effect of sin on the soul.<sup>55</sup> The Swiss Calvinist Pierre Viret exclaims in the 1583 English translation of his work *The Worlde Possessed by Devils*:

Because men can not well perceive how the Deuil hurteth their soules by meanes of sinne, God hath set forth this Image before their eyes in the persones of the possessed whiche are knowne to be suche, to the ende that by the[m] thei might learne to know, by the tyranny which the Deuill executeth on their bodies, what tyranny be useth on their soules when thei are given over to hym.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> George More, *A True Discourse Concerning the Certaine Possession and Dispossession of 7 Persons in One Familie in Lancashire, Which Also May Serve as Part of an Answer to a Fayned and False Discoverie Which Speaketh Very Much Evill, as Well of This, as of the Rest of Those Great and Mightie Workes of God Which Be of the Like Excellent Nature. By George More, Minister and Preacher of the Worde of God, and Now (for Bearing Witnesse Unto This, and for Justifying the Rest) a Prisoner in the Clink, Where He Hath Continued Almost for the Space of Two Yeares* (Middelburg, 1600), p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Harsnett, *A Discouery of the Fraudulent Practises of Iohn Darrel Bachelor of Artes: In His Proceedings Concerning the Pretended Possession and Dispossession of William Somers at Nottingham: Of Thomas Darling, the Boy of Burton at Caldwell: And of Katherine Wright at Mansfield, & Whittington: And of His Dealings with One Mary Couper at Nottingham, Detecting in Some Sort the Deceitfull Trade in These Latter Dayes of Casting out Devils* (London, 1599), p. 129.

<sup>54</sup> Clark, p. 402.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Raiswell, 'Edward Terry and the Demons of India', in *Knowing Demons, Knowing Spirits in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Michelle D. Brock, Richard Raiswell, and David R. Winter, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 171–210 (p. 192).

<sup>56</sup> Pierre Viret, *The Worlde Possessed with Devils, Conteyning Three Dialogues* (London, 1583), sig. E1<sup>r</sup>.

In this Calvinist paradigm, possession was a physical manifestation of the inner battle with demonic temptation raging in the demoniac's soul. The cunning nature of the Devil's temptations was thereby central to these possession narratives. During Sommers's demonic torments, for example, he was prevented by Satan from correctly reciting the Lord's Prayer: 'when he came to thes wordes *leade vs not into temptation*, he would say *leade vs into temptation*'.<sup>57</sup> In the Witches of Warboys ordeal (1589–93), Jane Throckmorton was continually tempted to cast herself into both fire and water 'but always when there were some companie and assistance by to help here'. Whether this 'hath proceeded of the gracious prouidence and goodnesse of GOD [...] or whether it hath been some secret illusi[o]n and mockerie of the Diuell to deceiue [...] cannot be determine amongst men'.<sup>58</sup> Alexander Nyndge's possession also neatly encapsulates the devious nature of the Devil's temptations. The possession narrative highlights Satan's constant designs on the soul and the schemes he employs in this pursuit:

Euen now (O Lord) in these perilous dayes, the Deuill and his ministers doe most busily seeke to sift vs by all meanes and wayes possible, and by euill workes, wherento he doth moue vs, and doth thrust into our hearts, that (without the assistance of thy grace) he may bring vs within the baits, and snares laid for our Soules.<sup>59</sup>

By 'meanes' and 'wayes', the writer was speaking of the temptations that the Devil presents to individuals during their possession. In the 1615 edition of this pamphlet the theme of temptation was further emphasised, with the language being far more explicit. Now Nyndge is actively encouraged by the assembled crowd 'to breake and beat downe the force and vehemencie of his [Satan's] strong temptations'.<sup>60</sup> This added material, Amy Tan notes, implies that one's response to the narrative should not primarily be fear of possession or the Devil, but rather fear of demonic temptations that might lead to God's judgement.<sup>61</sup> As this illustrates, temptation was conceived as a primary aspect of the possession experience, with the performance of the demoniac communicating the dire threat that Satan posed to the soul.

<sup>57</sup> Darrell, *A True Narration*, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> *The most strange and admirable discouerie of the three witches of Warboys, arraigned, conuicted, and executed at the last assises at Huntington, for the bewitching of the fiue daughters of Robert Throckmorton esquire, and diuers other persons, with sundrie diuellish and grievous torments: and also for the witching to death of the Lady Crumwell, the like hath not been heard of in this age* (London, 1593), sigs M4<sup>v</sup>–N1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Nyndge, *A true and fearefull vexation of one Alexander Nyndge. Beynge moste Horriblye tormented wyth an euyll Spirit. The .xx. daie of Ianuarie. At Lyeringswell in Suffolke. Written by his owne brother Edvard Nyndge Master of Arts, with the names of the witnesses that were at his vexation* (London, 1615), sig. B2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Nyndge, sig. B2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> Amy G. Tan, 'The Godly Re-presentation of Alexander Nyndge: Two Versions of a Protestant Dispossession Narrative', *The Seventeenth Century*, 34.5 (2019), 583–99 (pp. 588–89).

The possession account *Master Brigges Temptation*, detailing the demonic torments of aspiring barrister Robert Brigges in 1573–74, stands as the most pertinent example of demonic temptation in this textual format.<sup>62</sup> Notably, the term 'possession' (or any variant of it) does not appear in the source material, with 'temptation' or 'vexation' used in its place.<sup>63</sup> This indicates that temptation became intertwined, if not synonymous with, demonic possession in this period. Brigges's struggles, which resulted from an internalised spiritual anxiety, were possible only in a religious culture that placed an inordinate emphasis on sin.<sup>64</sup> After attending a theological lecture in London on blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, Brigges became convinced that he lived in abject sin and was unable to obtain salvation. Raised in a Catholic family, Brigges's exposure to Calvinist spirituality prompted a conversion experience, along with bouts of despair. Over the next few months, he struggled with this despair and, as his demonic affliction crystallised, he even attempted suicide. The Devil pursued Brigges relentlessly in different guises, 'cum hether of purpose to awayte for my sowle'.<sup>65</sup> Finally, his fits and strange utterances developed into a dialogue with Satan wherein he began to 'awnsuer the tem[p]ter, aperinge unto him sumtyme in one shape, sumetyme in another'.<sup>66</sup> Throughout the rest of this narrative, the Devil offers Brigges a series of temptations, promising him wealth, land, women, and fine clothes if the man would forfeit his soul. Encountering resistance, Satan attempts to drive Brigges further into despair by telling him that 'he shall have no comforte' and 'God despiseth synners'.<sup>67</sup> Brigges's dialogues with Satan lasted for weeks and the young man withstood all manner of temptations presented before him. With the clerical assistance of famed cleric John Foxe, Brigges resists the Devil's machinations and demonstrates his devotion to God. Overall, the Brigges case developed into the seminal model for many subsequent manifestations of demon possession in England, circulating widely as an unpublished manuscript.<sup>68</sup> It exemplifies how demonic possession cases in Calvinist territories expressed a profound engagement with demonic temptation, illustrating the means by which to overcome such sufferings. Furthermore, Brigges's torments vividly convey the threat to the soul that demonic temptation posed and the machinations that the Devil employs in pursuit of this goal.

<sup>62</sup> 'Master Brigges Temptation', London, British Library, Harley MS 590, fols 6–63. Hereafter, references will be to the facsimile included in Kathleen Sands, *An Elizabethan Lawyer's Possession by the Devil: The Story of Robert Brigges* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

<sup>63</sup> While the term 'possession' does not appear in the source material, every one of Brigges's demonic symptoms can be neatly mapped to early modern possession markers. Sands, *Elizabethan Lawyer's Possession*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>64</sup> Levack, p. 162.

<sup>65</sup> 'Master Brigges Temptation', p. H. 7.

<sup>66</sup> 'Master Brigges Temptation', p. H. 9.

<sup>67</sup> 'Master Brigges Temptation', p. H. 13.

<sup>68</sup> Kathleen Sands, *Demon Possession in Elizabethan England* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), p. 143.

The possession experience crossed the confessional divide in many instances, featuring a repertory of identifying markers with established spiritual meanings, yet one of the key distinctions between Catholic and Calvinist demoniacs was their moral culpability. Levack presents a detailed explanation of these differences in *The Devil Within*. Catholic demoniacs were generally not held accountable for what they did under the control of Satan, as the commission of sin required intention and wilful consent. In Catholic theology the soul remained under divine protection, and this provided comfort for the individual, as it assured them that salvation was always attainable if they remained steadfast.<sup>69</sup> Calvinist theology, on the other hand, indicated that the demoniac—along with the rest of the populace—was always morally compromised, with this as the proximate cause of their possession. No matter how pious the individual might be, internal sins still plagued their soul and left them vulnerable to demonic incursion. The inherent presence of sin within humanity, a fact that all Calvinists accepted, was proof in itself that they were already in the clutches of the Devil in some form or another.<sup>70</sup> This was, as the title of Viret's treatise attests, *The Worlde Possessed by Devils*. Thus, the spiritual despair that Calvinist demoniacs experienced far eclipsed that of their Catholic counterparts and provoked them to continually makes personal statements of guilt throughout their possession.<sup>71</sup> Brigges, for example, was convinced that he was 'the childe of perdition and abhorringe to lyve, for that all his prayers and thowghtes were infected and defiled'. Driven by such despair, he 'duly heped sinne upon sinne' in contemplating suicide.<sup>72</sup> There was also a concern that the demoniac's wicked nature was a sign that they were a witch or in league with the Devil, as William Sommers was accused of. This was not a prominent consideration in English possession cases, but it was widely believed that signing a demonic pact or covenant was one of the conditions the Devil could impose on an individual that succumbed to demonic temptation.<sup>73</sup> Contrary to Catholic possessions, which were not overly concerned with the sufferer's sinfulness, the compromised nature of Calvinist demoniacs conjured up these connotations.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, demoniacs sometimes attempted to mitigate these perceptions by framing their affliction as a spiritual trial, such as did Thomas Darling in 1596 and Mary Glover in 1602, yet they could never completely escape their sinful nature. Temptation in Calvinist theology afflicted everyone, from the wretched sinner to even the most pious of individuals, revealing that possession was as much a

<sup>69</sup> Levack, pp. 198, 207.

<sup>70</sup> Raiswell, p. 180.

<sup>71</sup> Levack, p. 208.

<sup>72</sup> 'Master Brigges Temptation', p. H. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Temptation was also a prominent aspect of satanic witchcraft, and many individuals supposedly became a witch after falling for the Devil's machinations. See Chapter 2 of Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft*, for explanation. For examples, see Charlotte-Rose Millar, *Witchcraft, The Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>74</sup> Levack, pp. 211–12.

spiritual or ethical phenomenon as it was a physical one. For this reason, Calvinist possession narratives were predicated on the struggle against temptation along with the spiritual anguish that the demoniacs experienced in this state.

The infamous possession of Thomas Darling in 1596, as described in the pamphlet *The Most Wonderfull and True Storie of a Certaine Witch Named Alse Gooderige of Stapenhill*, further typifies the significance of demonic temptation in Puritan piety. Fourteen-year-old Darling was an aspiring Godly minister, and his demonic possession, initiated by an encounter with a local witch, developed into the central focus of the Puritan community in Burton-upon-Trent (Staffordshire). Darling's extraordinary conflict with the Devil, at once a chastisement and a blessing, was undoubtedly an indication to the Burton Godly that they were religiously favoured.<sup>75</sup> This possession ordeal was lengthy, featuring interactions with individual demonic spirits, the infernal prince Beelzebub, and Satan. Darling was presented with various offerings in a manner that directly invokes Christ's temptations in the desert: 'My Sauieur Christ Jesus was tempted, and why then should not I bee so?'<sup>76</sup> The boy was encouraged by the demonic presence to renounce God and devote himself to Satan, who offered him a palace, a crown, and a great kingdom to rule. Darling resists with much fervour, exclaiming: 'my faith is so strong, that I will worship none but the liuing God.'<sup>77</sup> At a later stage during his possession, Satan promises him a 'faire woman [...] gorgeously apparail'd', who materialises before Darling's eyes.<sup>78</sup> The Devil also offers bags of silver and gold, then threatens Darling with eternal damnation when this tactic fails. This approach, according to Darrell, was how 'he [Satan] delt with these possessed persons [...] and after this manner he dealeth with vs all in the temptatio[n]s wherwith he continually assalteth vs: somtimes yea vsually settinge before our eyes the pleasure of the sinne he intiseth us unto'.<sup>79</sup> In the face of these demonic offerings, Darling's resolve held firm. Curiously, the nature and description of these temptations bear striking similarities to the Brigges possession, suggesting that Darling was familiar with this manuscript.<sup>80</sup> However, instead of a conversion experience, Darling's possession was fashioned to present himself and the Burton community as especially pious. With the 1597 publication of the *The Most Wonderfull and True Storie*, Darling's conflict with the Devil established an archetype for possession pamphlets and, like Brigges, his 'performance' was invoked by subsequent demoniacs. It is therefore fitting that the torments of Thomas Darling, predicated on resisting and triumphing over the Devil's

<sup>75</sup> Marion Gibson, *Possession, Puritanism and Print: Darrell, Harsnett, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Exorcism Controversy* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), p. 55.

<sup>76</sup> Bee and others, pp. 29–30.

<sup>77</sup> Bee and others, p. 12.

<sup>78</sup> Bee and others, p. 40.

<sup>79</sup> Darrell, 'The Doctrin of the Possession and Dispossession', p. 80.

<sup>80</sup> Sands, *Demon Possession*, p. 141.

temptations, developed into the most well-known demonic possession narrative in early modern England.

As demonic temptation was an ongoing condition in Reformed Protestantism, the demoniac was never completely cleansed of this corruption. Clerical mediation could only offer temporary relief and repossession was prevalent, and even expected, in many demonic possession cases. The demoniac, already weakened by their experiences, was always at risk of falling back under demonic occupation as their battle with temptation continued in perpetuity. Reflecting on Matthew 12.43–45 and Luke 11.24–26, Darrell exclaims ‘*when the vncleane spirit is gone out of a man, he sayeth to himselfe, I will returne into myne house from whence I came*’.<sup>81</sup> Those that have been removed from the Devil’s power only further incurred his wrath, and even greater torment awaited the demoniac if he ever resumed control over them. This was a standard trope in demonic possession narratives. After being dispossessed by Darrell in 1586, seventeen-year-old Katherine Wright was again confronted by Satan, who appeared before her ‘in the likenes of a handsome man, that making suite vnto her in the way of marriage, gaue her a piece of bread, shee in taking the same at the deuils handes, and eating it, became to be repossessed’.<sup>82</sup> Even the Godly demoniac Darling was repossessed, as the battle with the Devil had left his ‘heart emptie of faith’.<sup>83</sup> In the Sommers case, his dispossession (again carried out by Darrell) was followed by a warning. Delivering a sermon to the townsfolk of Nottingham, Darrell cautioned that their struggle with evil may not be over, as the Devil would actively seek to repossess Sommers.<sup>84</sup> A short time later Sommers, now joined by his sister Mary Cowper, was back under Satan’s influence.

In other English possession cases, Satan promised to ease the demoniac’s torments if they yielded to him and feigned their deliverance. During the Lancashire Seven ordeal, the maidservant Jane Ashton was the last remaining demoniac to be exorcised, she ‘being both the strongest & worst of all the rest’.<sup>85</sup> Ashton acquiesced to the Devil for temporary relief, simulating her deliverance: ‘She to be at ease consented, and pretended in words to be as well as the rest [the other demoniacs]’.<sup>86</sup> A few hours later the attending ministers returned and performed a dispossession, during which time Ashton confessed her weakness. She was then reprimanded by the minister John Dickons, who told her to never ‘beleue the deuil againe, beware of lying, he teacheth to lye, and you are taught for lying’.<sup>87</sup> Ashton evidently did not heed his advice and, even worse, turned to Catholicism. She retired, as Darrell relates a few years later, to ‘a place of

<sup>81</sup> Darrell, *A True Narration*, p. 20.

<sup>82</sup> Harsnett, p. 41.

<sup>83</sup> Bee and others, p. 38.

<sup>84</sup> Bee and others, p. 145.

<sup>85</sup> More, p. 69.

<sup>86</sup> Darrell, *A True Narration*, p. 12.

<sup>87</sup> Darrell, *A True Narration*, p. 13.

ignorance & among papists, & became popish herselfe, as I haue hard, for which oportunitie & aduantag the deuill watching, & noe doubt compasing, he then recouered her'.<sup>88</sup> Ashton's fate was a warning to all, depicting the physical torments that demonic possession entailed and vividly conveying the dire threat that temptation posed to one's soul.

### III. Curing the Soul

Christians were not powerless against the Devil, as God never subjected anyone to tribulations that they could not overcome.<sup>89</sup> If an individual experienced a demonic force creeping into their inner thoughts, either through internal or external means, then careful spiritual reflection was required. Greenham counsels 'to one complaining of sudden gripes and nips in the bodie, Of sudden feares in the minde, that we should make our vse of them: and though it were hard to search the particular cause of them'.<sup>90</sup> Following this, the individual had to devise a strategy to combat this demonic corruption. While Calvinists rejected the Catholic belief that one could fully protect oneself from the Devil—particularly involving the use of ceremonial objects such as candles, crucifixes, incense, bells, and holy water—they preached that such attacks could be endured. The best defence of the pious Christian was to maintain the order of their physical and spiritual body, exercising vigilance in the face of various maladies.<sup>91</sup> '[We] ought to haue a moderate care to preserue our bodily life and health', Perkins states, as 'the Lord inioyneth vs by all good meanes to preserue our owne and our neighbours life'.<sup>92</sup> However, if the demonic attack proved to be particularly vexing, then a minister was required to help guide individuals in resisting Satan.<sup>93</sup>

Puritan clerical mediation in resisting demonic assault necessitated the implementation of practical divinity. Practical divinity, as a genre of theological writing, developed as a response to the discontinuance of many practices and beliefs associated with the sacrament of penance. It was a broad genre designed to provide parishioners and clergymen with strategies to address the difficulties of everyday life. Perkins, one of the leading contributors to this genre, published works on everything: family, vocations, witchcraft, demonic affliction, conscience,

<sup>88</sup> Darrell, *A True Narration*, p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> Johnstone, p. 85.

<sup>90</sup> Greenham, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Norman Gevitz, 'Practical Divinity and Medical Ethics: Lawful versus Unlawful Medicine in the Writings of William Perkins (1558–1602)', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 68.2 (2012), 198–226 (p. 204).

<sup>92</sup> William Perkins, *A Godly And Learned Exposition of Christs Sermon in the Mount: Preached in Cambridge by that Reuerend and iudicious Diuine M. William Perkins. Published at the request of his exequutors by Th. Pierson preacher of Gods word. Whereunto is adioyned a twofold table: one, of speciall points here handled; the other, of choise places of Scripture here quoted* (Cambridge, 1608), p. 287.

<sup>93</sup> Johnstone, pp. 101–02.

living and dying well, and governing one's speech.<sup>94</sup> Temptation, and the means by which clergy could administer relief, emerged as a prominent theme of his works and the genre itself.<sup>95</sup> The primary function of the Reformed minister was that of a counsellor or educator, instructing the afflicted individual how to conceive of the illness along with how to conduct their self.<sup>96</sup> In *A Treatise of the Duties and Dignities of the Ministerie*, Perkins counsels that a Godly clergyman 'must priuately *conferre, visite, admonish, and rebuke*; and principally they must *preach*, and that in such good manner, and in so diligent measure, as that they may redeeme and winne soules, and the end that they must ayme at, must be to winne soules'.<sup>97</sup> As physicians of the soul, English ministers were the frontline against demonic incursion and they were responsible for guiding the afflicted through this harrowing trial.

A central aspect of clerical mediation in cases of demonic assault was to strengthen that individual's resolve against temptation by arming them with the necessary spiritual tools. Puritan ministers advised their parishioners to take up the spiritual sword and armour in battling the Devil, invoking the imagery of Ephesians 6.17.<sup>98</sup> As the Suffolk preacher Thomas Carew outlines in his 1603 *Ceryaine godly and necessarie sermons*, equipping the armour of God was 'what every man doth if he be a Christian', with this an integral part of the sanctification process.<sup>99</sup> This sentiment is echoed by Perkins:

Oh then how carefull should we be for the safetie of our soules to put vpon vs the whole armour of God, and to learne to vse aright this *sword of the spirit*, that when we meet with Satan our irreconcilable enemy, in the field of temptation, which is this miserable world, we may be able both to award his blowes, and to wound his head!<sup>100</sup>

John Denison, editor of *The Most Wonderful and True Storie*, writes that the purpose of this work is to reveal the weapons that God had provided for the 'spiritual warfare of his children' in battling demonic tyranny.<sup>101</sup> Imagery of this nature is employed all throughout this possession narrative: 'in all manner of temptations of Sathan, they [demoniacs] haue the whole armor of God, yea and

<sup>94</sup> Gevitz, p. 199.

<sup>95</sup> Luttmer, p. 46.

<sup>96</sup> Gevitz, p. 205.

<sup>97</sup> William Perkins, 'A Treatise of the Duties and Dignities of the Ministerie', in *Of the Calling of the Ministerie, Two Treatises. Describing the Duties and Dignities of that Calling. Deliuered Publicly in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, by Maister Perkins. Taken then from his mouth, and now dilligently perused and published, by a preacher of the word* (London, 1606), pp. 48–49.

<sup>98</sup> 'And take the helmet of saluation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the worde of God' (Geneva Bible, 1599).

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Carew, *Certaine godly and necessarie Sermons, preached by M. Thomas Carew of Bilston in the countie of Suffolke* (London, 1603), fol. 17<sup>r</sup>; Luttmer, p. 45.

<sup>100</sup> Perkins, *Combat Betweene Christ and the Diuell*, p. 20.

<sup>101</sup> Bee and others, sig. A2<sup>r</sup>.

those weapons that are able to overthrow the Diuel's strongest holdes'.<sup>102</sup> It was also necessary for the demoniac to understand that their soul could be saved, as the blood of Christ afforded protection to all that believed. In his dialogue with Satan concerning the soul of his brother, Edward Nyndge states: '*Wee haue a warrant in the holy Scriptures, that such as doe earnestly repent them of their sins, and turne vnto God with the only hope of Saluation, through the merits of Jesus Christ, thou mayest not haue them, for Christ is his Redeemer*'.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Briggs exclaims to the Devil during his possession that Christ's blood was payment for his soul: 'Have I not tolde thee that my sowle ys nott myne, though I wolde geve it? How can I geve that which is not myne? [...] The Lorde Jhesus hath bought it'.<sup>104</sup> Being aware of divine protection, however, was not always enough, as God's providence was incomprehensible to humanity. If the resolve of the demoniac faltered, or if the Devil's hold was simply too powerful, then spiritual healing was required.

In purging the soul of demonic influence, prayer and fasting developed as the biblically prescribed methods for dispossession in the Reformed Protestant tradition.<sup>105</sup> For Protestants, 'magical' Catholic rituals were unable to provide adequate protection against Satan because, concerned only with externals, this form of exorcism failed to resist a being with the power to enter into the soul.<sup>106</sup> To perform a 'true' deliverance, it was necessary to strip away all the ceremonial elements and return to the Scriptures. As described in Luke 8.26–39, Matthew 8.28–34, and Mark 5.1–20, Jesus performed what is regarded as one of the primary examples of New Testament exorcism, driving the evil spirits out of a man in the country of the Gerasenes.<sup>107</sup> In Mark 9.29, after delivering a possessed boy of his demons, Jesus instructs his disciples how to expel demonic spirits: 'This kinde can by no other meanes come foorth, but by prayer and fasting'.<sup>108</sup> Fasting had long been perceived as essential to spiritual endeavours and, as Thomas Becon (a sixteenth-century English theologian), establishes in his extensive *A Fruitful Treatise of Fasting*, this spiritual exercise was conceived as the most effective means of demonstrating devotion to the Lord.<sup>109</sup> Henry Mason, active in the early seventeenth century, claims that fasting elevates the mind towards God by estranging it from the sense of worldly things, 'chastening the body for the sinnes of our soules'.<sup>110</sup> The application of prayer and fasting for dispossession

<sup>102</sup> Bee and others, sig. A2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>103</sup> Nyndge, sig. A4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>104</sup> 'Master Briggs Temptation', p. H. 47.

<sup>105</sup> Levack, p. 39.

<sup>106</sup> Johnstone, p. 83.

<sup>107</sup> Depending on the gospel, there are either one or two Gerasene demoniacs.

<sup>108</sup> Mark 9.29 (Geneva Bible, 1599).

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Becon, *A Fruitful Treatise of Fasting Wherin Is Declared What Ye Christen Fast Is, How We Ought to Fast, [and] What Ye True Vse of Fastyng Is. Newlye Made by Thomas Becon* (London, 1551).

<sup>110</sup> Henry Mason, *Christian Hvmiliation, Or, A Treatise Of Fasting: Declaring the Nature, Kindes, Ends, Vses, and Properties of a Religious Fast: Together with a briefe Discourse*

is exemplified in the Mary Glover case. For this, the gathered Puritan ministers performed spiritual exercises (including prayer and fasting) to prepare themselves for the upcoming dispossession. As the source material relates, Master Skelton

framed some words of exhortation to repentance, and especially to an earnest humiliation of their soules and bodies before the Lord, that he seeing them (especiallly those that were most interested in the distressed) truely humbled; he might in mercy and goodnes lift them vp, by givinge deliuerance and grantinge comfort in his good time, in what manner and measure it pleased him, and that not for any other, but his owne truth and promise sake.<sup>111</sup>

Because of the widespread perception of fasting as beneficial to the soul, it was believed to be a fundamental method in resisting the Devil.<sup>112</sup> Fasting, as Christ did for forty days and nights in the desert, was intended to strengthen oneself against the Devil's temptations. Calvin asserts that extraordinary faith is required in battling Satan and any weakness was to be 'adioyneth [by] fasting as a helpe'.<sup>113</sup> Fasting consequently became a powerful spiritual exercise in resisting and casting out demonic spirits in Calvinist spirituality.

Dispossession through prayer and fasting was a method that was both effective and innocuous, as both spiritual exercises were fundamental to Christian spirituality. This model of dispossession was simply an application of the countermeasures that Protestant demonism prescribed for resisting Satan's assaults in general, largely indistinguishable from other forms of clerical healing.<sup>114</sup> As there was a distinct lack of formal liturgy surrounding exorcism in English Protestantism, dispossession developed into another form of clerical mediation rather than as a specialised rite. During the sixteenth century, revisions to the Book of Common Prayer had removed baptismal and liturgical exorcism rites altogether, thereby emphasising a more improvisational approach in resisting the Devil.<sup>115</sup> Under the ministry of John Darrell, prayer and fasting became the definitive means of expelling demonic spirits in early modern England.<sup>116</sup> Darrell was highly successful in popularising the old practice of spiritual self-abasement to resist demonic incursion, presenting it in a manner that was accessible to any devout

*concerning the Fast of Lent. The Second Edition, revised and enlarged* (London, 1627), p. 21.

<sup>111</sup> John Swan, *A True and Breife Report, of Mary Glouers Vexation and of Her Deliuerance by the Meanes of Fasting and Prayer. Performed by Those Whose Names Are Set Downe, in the Next Page* (n.p., 1603), p. 5.

<sup>112</sup> Sands, *Demon Possession*, p. 16.

<sup>113</sup> Jean Calvin, *A Harmonie Vpon The Three Euangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, with the Commentarie of M. Iohn Caluine: Faithfullie translated out of Latine into English, by E. P. Whereunto is also added a Commentarie vpon the Euangelist S. Iohn, by the same authour* (London, 1584), p. 480 (Matthew 17.21).

<sup>114</sup> Johnstone, p. 103.

<sup>115</sup> Young, pp. 46–47.

<sup>116</sup> Carew, fol. 17<sup>v</sup>; Luttmer, p. 45.

Christian.<sup>117</sup> Prayer and fasting, in the words of Darrell, are a 'medicine appoynted of god [...] *to resist the diuill*, not only his temptatio[n]s, but also his perso[n] [...] & so not only tempting, but also possessing'.<sup>118</sup> He equates dispossession with active resistance against demonic temptation, conceptualising it as an essential aspect of spiritual warfare. 'Now when God sendeth any judgement therby he *calleth* men, and therin secretly commandeth them to fast and praye.'<sup>119</sup> Not only was dispossession the correct response to exceptional instances of demonic assault, but it was a spiritual practice that magnified 'the glorie of God' and furthered 'the benefit of man, and good he may receiue thereby'.<sup>120</sup>

The process of dispossession required that both the exorcist and the demoniac humble their souls. While clergy might provide spiritual guidance, the active participation of the demoniac was paramount in sanctifying their soul against demonic temptation. Darling, following the spiritual guidance of Darrell, fiercely resisted the Devil's advances and proclaimed in his dialogues with Satan that his soul was protected against demonic temptation. 'I shall worship the Lord God onely. And dost thou say, that if I wil not worship thee, thou wilt torment me three times more; if thou torment me three hundred times, yet canst thou not touch my soule'.<sup>121</sup> Such performative displays of devotion were essential in sanctifying the demoniac, preparing them to overcome the Devil's temptations. This culminated in the decisive moment in which the sufferer took upon their self the responsibility for procuring deliverance through their unyielding faith.<sup>122</sup> Possession narratives usually marked this moment with a dramatic description of the demonic spirit leaving the body, invoking Mark 9.26.<sup>123</sup> In the Lancashire Seven case, the deliverance of one demoniac is described thus: 'she lay as dead for the space of half an hour, taking no breath', before suddenly sitting up 'most

<sup>117</sup> Sands, *Demon Possession*, p. 116. Thomas Freeman notes that fasting was not a part of many early Protestant exorcisms and John Foxe, the most famous English exorcist before Darrell, did not employ it during his ministry. Thomas Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance: John Darrell and the Politics of Exorcism in Late Elizabethan England', in *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560–1660*, ed. by Peter Lake and Michael Questier (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2000), pp. 34–63 (p. 39).

<sup>118</sup> Darrell, 'The Doctrin of the Possession and Dispossession', p. 65.

<sup>119</sup> Darrell, 'The Doctrin of the Possession and Dispossession', p. 66.

<sup>120</sup> Darrell, 'The Doctrin of the Possession and Dispossession', p. 68.

<sup>121</sup> Bee and others, p. 10. However, the Darling possession is unique, as the Burton community was able to conduct the actual dispossession itself. Darrell writes 'I am perswaded that the faithfull prayers of the parties friends may prevaile with God in this case: though no Preacher be present'. In saying that, the involvement of ministers John Darrell, John Denison, Arthur Hildersham, William Walkeden, and many more was paramount. John Darrell, *A Brief Apologie Prouing the Possession of William Sommers. Written by Iohn Dorrell, a Faithful Minister of the Gospell: But Published without His Knowledge, with a Dedicatorie Epistle Disclosing Some Disordered Proceedings against the Saide Iohn Dorrell* (Middelburg, 1599), pp. 31–32.

<sup>122</sup> Johnstone, p. 104.

<sup>123</sup> 'Then the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out, and he was as one dead, in so much that many said, He is dead' (Geneva Bible, 1599).

ioyfully, magnifying god, with such a cherefull countenance and voyce, that we all reioiced with her, but were somewhat amazed at hir suddayn lauding of god'.<sup>124</sup> A dark mist is described as emerging from her body in the 'liknes of a crows head rounde, (as to her semed)', lingering in the corner of the room before flying out of the window.<sup>125</sup> This particular possession narrative emphasises the form of the demonic spirit—only discernible to the demoniac—as a dramatic representation of the demonic corruption that the demoniac's soul suffers whilst under the throes of possession, establishing the means in which such corruption can be effectively purged through earnest prayer and fasting.<sup>126</sup> The expulsion of the evil spirit certainly granted relief from the physical symptoms of demonic possession, yet the true victory was being delivered from the effects of sin.<sup>127</sup> By this, demonic possession accounts gave hope to their readers that they too could conquer their sinfulness, with the clergy depicted as both spiritual warriors and physicians of the soul.

The contentious issue of clerical dispossession was largely put to rest in the early 1600s as the English ecclesiastical authorities introduced legislation that curtailed this spiritual practice. Concerned about the threat of Nonconformist parties using spiritual healing to proselytise—exemplified by Darrell's exorcism ministry and the ensuing high-profile Mary Glover possession—the episcopacy passed Canon 72 in 1604.<sup>128</sup> This church canon specified that all ministers required a licence to enact dispossession and, because of the cautious attitudes to demonic possession and witchcraft held by the episcopacy, this legislation effectively ended clerical exorcism in England.<sup>129</sup> Canon 72 did not deny the continued manifestation of demonic possession, but established that dispossession was beyond the purview of the clergy. Exorcism was hence driven to the margins of English society as folk healers and recusants stepped in to fill this void.

The introduction of Canon 72, however, was not a total defeat for the Godly movement, as dispossession was always a fraught matter amongst the clergy. Darrell, the champion of Protestant dispossession, was adamant that it is a sin to not fight evil with whatever spiritual tools are available, 'because it was a breach

<sup>124</sup> Darrell, *A True Narration*, p. 10.

<sup>125</sup> Darrell, *A True Narration*, p. 11.

<sup>126</sup> Other possession narratives were ambivalent about this aspect of describing the departing spirit, as it did not necessarily align with the Calvinist emphasis on a spiritualised Devil.

<sup>127</sup> Levack, p. 163.

<sup>128</sup> Church of England, *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiasticall, Treated vpon by the Bishop of London, President of the Conuocation for the Prouince of Canterbury, and the rest of the Bishops and Clergie of the said Prouince: And agreed vpon with the Kings Maiesties Licence in their Synode begun at London anno Dom. 1603. And in the year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord James, by the grace of God, King of England, France, and Ireland the first, and of Scotland the 37. And now published for the due observation of them, by His Majesty's authority, under the great seal of England* (London, 1604), sig. M4<sup>r</sup>–M4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>129</sup> Records indicate that many of the known cases of possession in this period resulted in exposure, charges of fraud, or the failure to secure a witch for conviction. Bhogal, p. 320.

of a Commandment, *Resist the diuell*'.<sup>130</sup> George Gifford offers a more cautious approach. Writing as the Godly character Daniel in *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes*, Gifford declares: 'He [Satan] is the Lords executioner, he hath sent him, wee may intreat the Lord to remooue him, but what authority haue we to command him to depart, where God hath sent him?'<sup>131</sup> Perkins highlights the providential dimension of demonic possession while dismissing exorcism as a spiritual gift that 'continued not much aboue the space of 200. yeares after Christ [...] from which time many heresies beganne to spread themselues'.<sup>132</sup> This indecisiveness does not in any way indicate that Godly ministers abandoned their ministerial responsibly in resisting the Devil. On the contrary. They redoubled their efforts and, partly in response to a decline in demonic possession cases, began placing more emphasis on Satan as a predominantly spiritual threat.<sup>133</sup> Even Darrell concedes that the Devil's spiritual assaults, such as what Judas Iscariot suffered, were 'more common, so it is a worse kinde of possession [...] not so easely and quicklie cured'.<sup>134</sup> Knowledge developed into the most important weapon against demonic assault, and ministers subsequently set out to inform individuals on the intricacies of temptation.<sup>135</sup> Works of practical divinity were published in greater frequency throughout the seventeenth century, with Puritan ministers like Thomas Brooks, Richard Gilpin, and William Gurnall at the forefront of this genre.<sup>136</sup> Demonic temptation remained the overarching threat to Christians and Puritan ministers—physicians of the soul—continued to offer spiritual guidance in resisting the Devil.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Bee and others, p. 33.

<sup>131</sup> Gifford, sig. 12<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>132</sup> Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft*, p. 238.

<sup>133</sup> For a survey of resistance practices in post-1604 cases of demonic possession, see Amy G. Tan, 'Resisting the Devil: The Case of Edward Dynham (1626) and Options for English Protestant Dispossession', *Reformation & Renaissance Review*, 19.2 (2017), 135–53.

<sup>134</sup> Darrell, 'The Doctrin of the Possession and Dispossession', p. 80.

<sup>135</sup> Johnstone, p. 96.

<sup>136</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satans Devices. Or, Salve for Believers and Unbelievers Sores. Being a Companion for those that are in Christ, or out of Christ; That are high, or low, learned, or illiterate, staggering, or wandering; That slight, or neglect Ordinances, under a pretence of living above them; That are growing (in spiritualls) or decaying; That are Tempted, or Deserted, afflicted, or Opposed; That have Assurance, or that want Assurance; That are Self-seekers, or the Common-wealths Caterpillars; That are in love sweetly united, or that yet have their spirits too much imbittered, &c.* (London, 1653); Richard Gilpin, *Demonologia Sacra. Or, A Treatise of Satans Temptations. In Three Parts* (London, 1677); William Gurnall, *The Christian In Compleat Armour, Or, a Treatise Of The Saints War against the Devil, wherein a Discovery is made of that grand enemy of God and his People, in his Policies, Power, Seat of his Empire, Wickednesse, and chief design he hath against the Saints* (London, 1655).

<sup>137</sup> For a study on the transition towards a more spiritualised interpretation of demonic assault in Stuart England, see Darren Oldridge, 'Demons of the Mind: Satanic Thoughts in Seventeenth-century England', *The Seventeenth Century*, 35.3 (2020), 277–292.

#### IV. Conclusion

As humanity's inheritance from Adam was that of total depravity, the life of the pious Christian was thereby characterised by spiritual warfare: a constant battle with the temptation to commit sin. Temptation was conceptualised as an overwhelming threat to humanity because diabolic incursions not properly resisted threatened to explode within the soul, allowing sin to grow exponentially.<sup>138</sup> The most dramatic form of demonic temptation was demonic possession; so much so that Pierre Viret boldly claimed that all humans were, or could be, possessed by demons, as sin was our perpetual state of being.<sup>139</sup> Demoniacs, in this Calvinist framework, were held up as emblems: a microcosm through which the whole world was reduced to their condition.<sup>140</sup> Demonic possession in early modern England was thus construed as a manifestation of humanity's struggle with temptation, and ministers were actively working to guide parishioners in resisting these temptations. The texts examined in this article perpetuate an all-encompassing conceptualisation of the Devil which places more emphasis on the inevitability and pervasiveness of diabolic assault than on a systematic understanding of this condition. Nathan Johnstone's argument for the centrality of temptation in Reformed Protestantism provides a dynamic framework through which to interpret conflict with the demonic. This argument has been further developed to reshape scholarly readings of demonic possession in early modern England by emphasising the spiritual dimension of this affliction. Not only does this approach further contextualise the phenomenon of demonic possession in early modern England, but it reconciles it with the broader Calvinist theological and pastoral understandings of temptation.

Possession narratives exemplified the effect of demonic incursion on the soul, outlining how failure to resist temptation would result in damnation. In the pamphlet describing Alexander Nyndge's possession, the author states that the demoniac's battle with the Devil 'is worthy to be remembred both for example, and warning. For describing the horror and vnheard of misery that fell vpon him, we may be thereby drawne to descend into our selues, and to looke into our soules betimes, least Heauen powre downe the viols of wrath vpon vs'.<sup>141</sup> These narratives also conveyed the measures necessary in protecting the soul from demonic temptation in the form of dispossession. Other theological treatises, predominantly those from the genre of practical divinity, largely focused on strengthening one's spiritual defences. Both types of devotional literature profoundly encapsulate the Calvinist concern with sin and demonic temptation, along with fashioning the English clergy as physicians of the soul. Clerical mediation therefore materialised in many different forms in this period. Either through the implementation of practical divinity or with the more decisive spiritual exercise of dispossession, cleansing the soul of demonic corruption was presented as a principal duty of the

<sup>138</sup> Johnstone, pp. 79–80.

<sup>139</sup> Viret, sig. D4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>140</sup> Clark, p. 420.

<sup>141</sup> Nyndge, sig. A3<sup>r</sup>.

Calvinist minister. This was a duty of the utmost importance and all-too-deserving of reverence, as Perkins concludes: 'For if we must honor the bodily Physitian [...] who cureth but the diseases of the bodie: how much more ought we to honour spirituall physitians, which cure the spirituall maladies of our soules?'<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Perkins and Cudworth, p. 464.