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*A History of Anglican Exorcism: Deliverance and Demonology
in Church Ritual* by Francis Young (review)

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Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural, Volume
8, Number 1, 2019, pp. 159-163 (Review)

Published by Penn State University Press



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A History of Anglican Exorcism: Deliverance and Demonology in Church Ritual. By Francis Young. London: I. B. Tauris, 2018. 256 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1788313476. \$95.00.

Reviewed by Brendan C. Walsh

The resurgence of demonic possession in modern Anglican spirituality has received a considerable amount of scholarly attention. Given that for over three centuries the Church of England was largely skeptical of postapostolic possessions and placed strict limitations on the conditions under which an exorcism could take place, this shift in ecclesiastical policy during the mid-twentieth century is indeed a development that merits further analysis. Following his study on Catholic exorcism (*A History of Exorcism in Catholic Christianity*, 2016), Francis Young turns his focus to this ritual in the Anglican tradition. In *A History of Anglican Exorcism: Deliverance and Demonology in Church Ritual*, Young presents an engrossing intellectual history of the theological, canonical, and liturgical development of exorcism in Anglicanism. He examines whether an Anglican “tradition” of exorcism is historically tenable. As such, *A History of Anglican Exorcism* provides the first complete historical study of Anglican exorcism and, more importantly, a significant entry in the field of church history.

A History of Anglican Exorcism commences in the latter half of the sixteenth century, a period covered extensively in the relevant literature by scholars such as Marion Gibson and Thomas Freeman. In his first chapter, Young explores the paradoxical relationship that the Church of England has historically shared with demonic possession and exorcism, demonstrating that this ritual was largely accepted in the Church of England until the late sixteenth century. After a few controversial cases in this period, exorcism (or “dispossession”) was labeled as a threat to spiritual unity, perceived to be linked with both Catholicism and Puritanism. The High Commission of the renowned Puritan exorcist John Darrell in the late 1590s effectively condemned exorcism as heterodoxy, leading to the introduction of significant ecclesiastical reform in 1604. Canon 72 of the Church of England, while not denying the reality of demonic possession, stipulated that exorcisms required episcopal permission. This canon, as Young highlights in successive chapters, “ensured that an anti-exorcistic tradition would dominate the Church of England until the twentieth century” (17).

One of the biggest contributions to the scholarship that *A History of Anglican Exorcism* offers is the subject covered in chapters 2 and 3. Few scholars have examined the status of Anglican exorcism in the post-1604 context, and Young

does much to address this substantial gap in the scholarship. He intricately illustrates how exorcism in the Anglican tradition was pushed to the periphery but never completely suppressed. With belief in demonic possession continuing, particularly at the rural level, demands for exorcism persisted, and the laity developed more nuanced understandings of this spiritual affliction. For example, the exorcism of ghosts developed as a viable alternative to that of demoniacs, successfully circumnavigating Canon 72 and fostering demands for exorcisms over the next few centuries.

In the Victorian era, demonic possession reemerged as a viable spiritual experience. With the confluence of competing spiritual movements, exorcism began to shift to the forefront of Anglican spirituality. Early Pentecostalism placed emphasis on spiritual healing, shaping the construction of exorcism in the Anglican faith. In what Young terms the “supernatural turn,” the Anglican Church moved to denounce popular occultism while simultaneously embracing the demonological language that it advocated, while throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, “spiritualism changed the terms of internal debate about the preternatural within the Church of England,” thereby preparing “the way for a more accepting attitude towards possession and exorcism” (95). Interconfessional rivalry also influenced this shift as the Catholic Church was perceived as retreating from exorcism at this time. Exorcism has long been recognized as an effective form of spiritual propaganda, and the Anglican Church’s attempts to move into this vacant space illustrated that they were prepared to mount a substantial offensive against Roman Catholicism.

In the twentieth century, exorcism came to prominence through the efforts of a number of Anglican exorcists and demonologists. As Young demonstrates through careful analysis of demonological publications and personal writings, figures such as Gilbert Shaw and Max Petitpierre proved to be instrumental in institutionalizing deliverance ministry in the Church of England. Shaw, whom Young credits as the father of modern Anglican exorcism, emerged as an authority on demonology, “single-handedly reinvent[ing] the ministry” (115). Young describes Shaw’s construction of demonology, shaped by belief in psychic phenomenon, and his translation of Catholic liturgical forms of exorcism, as underpinning the contemporary ministry of deliverance. Shaw’s successor, Petitpierre, also developed a public image as an exorcist, and he helped shape ecclesiastical policy in the 1970s. These two professional exorcists were among many to introduce viable models of demonological theology into Church of England doctrine, effectively purging exorcism of its roots in popular spirituality.

One of the central concerns of *A History of Anglican Exorcism* is the development of exorcism liturgy, with Young detailing changes to this ritual over the past few centuries. Notably, prayer and fasting—the established means of dispossession in the sixteenth-century Calvinist tradition—bear little resemblance to what Anglican exorcism developed into during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through the influence of Anglo-Catholicism, the rites of exorcism were adapted from Catholic doctrine into Anglican spiritual discourse. After centuries of suppression, the adjuration of demons became a central feature of Anglican exorcism—precisely what the ecclesiastical authorities feared in the late sixteenth century. The subsequent emergence of deliverance ministry is significant, with exorcism rebranded as deliverance in the twenty-first century. Much of Young's study pivots on the introduction of deliverance, as this shift facilitated the resurgence of Anglican exorcisms. Deliverance ministry is conceptualized as one of spiritual healing, divided between minor (associated with rites and sacraments) and major (adjuration of demons) exorcisms. From the 1970s onward, exorcism was successfully integrated and bureaucratized into Anglican doctrine, with deliverance ministry increasingly recognized as the official terminology.

While Canon 72 would remain in force until 1969, Young demonstrates that it was widely perceived as obsolete and unenforceable. Many clergymen now supported the application of exorcism and were continually petitioned by parishioners to perform this ritual. Despite no ecclesiastical policy replacing Canon 72, episcopal control of exorcism was still largely maintained in the ensuing period. The 1972 Exeter Report, authored by Petitpierre, aspired to provide a framework for Anglican deliverance. Notably, this report recommended that practitioners should consider physical or mental causes before attempting an exorcism, illustrating the Anglican Church's engagement with modern medical and psychiatric paradigms. After 1972, many dioceses appointed deliverance specialists as exorcism began to be rapidly normalized. In 1975, Archbishop of Canterbury Donald Coggan formally endorsed exorcism with the House of Bishops, confirming the official status of this ritual.

Simultaneously, resistance emerged from different wings of the Anglican Church. After a number of controversial cases in the 1970s involving demonic possession, including a brutal murder, the church established a commission. Subsequently, a coalition of ministers led a campaign against exorcism. Geoffrey Lampe, Cambridge University's Regius Professor of Divinity, and Don Cupitt, Dean of Emmanuel College, led this campaign, arguing that the faith of the Church of England "has traditionally been sober, pure and orderly," a faith

where “ideas of possession have no place” (147). Young frames this campaign as an attempt to reflect on the Church of England’s historical stance on exorcism, its subsequent defeat an indicator of modern Anglicanism’s lack of perspective on its own past.

A History of Anglican Exorcism is adamant that, when it comes to its own history, the Church of England has not sufficiently engaged with the scholarship on exorcism. That is to say, it is difficult to conclude that a tradition of Anglican exorcism is even discernable, considering that the church has been largely ignorant of its own historical stance on this ritual. As Young concludes, Lampe’s contention that exorcism is at variance with the traditions of the Anglican Church “has yet to be answered satisfactorily by contemporary Anglican demonologists and others who advocate the continuing legitimacy and necessity of exorcism in the Church of England” (192). The emergence of many different types of exorcism liturgy, from dispossession to deliverance and adjuration, highlights that a clear intellectual lineage is not really viable. Young thus contends that if Anglicans defend exorcism as a necessary ministry in modern Anglicanism, they must also be prepared to admit that it “is essentially a twentieth-century invention whose use the Church must justify without recourse to spurious precedents” (192).

In his final chapter, Young examines Anglican exorcism in the twenty-first century. At present, the forty-two Anglican dioceses of England each emphasize exorcism in different ways, with discretion falling to the respective bishops. Deliverance has become an official duty of parish care, with popular demand now at an all-time high. Accordingly, the *Common Worship Book* (published in 2000) established an official form of exorcism liturgy, solidifying the Church of England’s engagement with exorcism. Perhaps the most notable development in the past decade is the church’s increased awareness of spiritual abuse. Exorcism guidelines were reformed in 2012 after a report in 2010 highlighted concerns about child protection, and the church introduced regular training and an increased focus on episcopal permission. Young makes the point that, despite such measures, these attempts at safeguarding, along with the church’s failure to debate exorcism openly, raise troubling questions about the tenability of the exorcism ministry as a whole. How can the Church of England, he asks, continue to offer exorcisms when it refuses to seriously engage with its own history on the matter?

What Young so eruditely communicates in *A History of Anglican Exorcism* is how possession and exorcism have been subject to competing interests within the Anglican Church, their status constantly changing in response to

broader spiritual and cultural developments. From early modern suppression to nineteenth-century interest in spirituality and Pentecostalism, the history of Anglican exorcism is defined as one of continual reassessment. Nominally, this ongoing conflict has manifested through internal tensions between the liberal, conservative, and evangelical wings of the Anglican Church. In this respect, Young convincingly argues that the reemergence of exorcism in the Church of England was largely driven by Pentecostal spirituality and a concerted effort to evangelize the laity, rather than by a desire to return to the “exorcistic traditions” of early modern Anglicanism. With all this in mind, *A History of Anglican Exorcism* stands as an excellent piece of church history, the first extended scholarly investigation into the complex and paradoxical relationship that the Church of England has shared with exorcism.

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