

RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY

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DELIVERANCE

DEEP-HEALING MINISTER
DEALS DEADLY BLOW
TO DEMONS, EVIL SPIRITS



A giant effigy of the demon king Ravana is prepared for burning during the fall Ramilla festival in Bombay to celebrate the triumph of good over evil.

GORDON LEGGE
CALGARY HERALD

Charles Kraft doesn't like to think of himself as an exorcist.

Rather the gentle, soft-spoken academic prefers to call what he does "a deep-healing ministry" during which he performs deliverance, dealing a deadly blow to demons and evil spirits.

Kraft demonstrated his skills recently during a three-day workshop, Taking Authority Over Dark Powers, at St. Peter's Anglican Church in Okotoks.

"I don't like that name (exorcist)," says Kraft. "But I suppose people who don't know any better might."

For him, the word "exorcist" conjures up images of a Hollywood priest brandishing a cross and splashing holy water around.

Kraft, a linguist and anthropologist who teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary in California, subscribes to the biblical view that demons are fallen angels which operate according to a hierarchy of power, a view shared by other Christians.

For instance, Pope John Paul II talked last year about his belief in the devil and other demons.

Other Christians are more circumspect, cautious about the idea of personifying evil.

"I would say that it's clear that there is a force or power for evil, or non-being, or nothingness that is very palpable or real," says Rev. Chris Levan, principal of St. Stephen's College, a United Church college in Edmonton.

The United Church recently reintroduced exorcism into its baptismal rite, where individuals renounce the devil or evil.

But the theologian questions whether it's personified in any way. Whenever the spiritual side of life is discussed, it's always in metaphorical terms, he observes. "Demon is a metaphor for evil."

When Jesus cast out demons, he was dispelling people's bondage to destructive ideas and behaviour, which were called spirits, says Levan. "We'd call it abnormal psychology."

But, he notes, abnormal psychology has a spiritual side to it. It represents more than just emotional problems. "The essence of who you are, your soul, has gotten twisted."

Levan is convinced, however, that there is a collective evil force that supercedes individual behaviour. That's the only way he can account for communal actions like ethnic cleansing.

University of Calgary psychology professor Greg Fouts chuckles when the subject is raised. "The current view of demons in psychology is very skeptical," says Fouts, who receives a

couple of calls a month about the paranormal.

But, he notes, there is widespread belief in them, fuelled particularly in recent years by the entertainment industry. For instance, Brimstone, a new television show this fall, deals with the devil and 13 vicious criminals who escape from hell to wreak havoc on Earth.

In fact, Kraft was featured in a recent Arts and Entertainment special about demons in November.

As for the actual phenomenon, social sciences are unable to prove or disprove their existence, says Fouts.

But belief in them influences people, says Fouts. Belief in demons can sometimes help a person better understand the world.

"Whether demons are real or not is not the question," says Fouts. "Does it help them cope?"

"Whether or not there is hard evidence, the point is even if they don't exist, belief in them influences the person, their fears, their emotions, the kinds of people they associate with and, of course, their religious beliefs," says Fouts.

Outside North America and Europe, belief in demons remains commonplace.

In fact, University of Calgary religious studies professor Eliezer Segal tells his students that this is one of the few societies that doesn't believe in demons.

Within Judaism, for instance, there isn't much about them in the official religion. But there is a powerful folkloric tradition with considerable supporting anecdotal evidence, says Segal, who teaches about Judaism.

When Jesus cast out demons, he was only one of many doing it at the time. The Greeks believed in it too, he says.

"Now we send people for 30 years of therapy," says Segal. "The thing about exorcism is that it seems to get results right away."

For his part, Kraft believes that evil spirits discover an entry point in a person either by invitation or because there's an emotional and/or a spiritual weakness.

He doesn't, however, subscribe to the notion of "demonic possession" — unless a shaman invites demons to take control. Instead, Kraft prefers the idea of demonization, which simply



Saint Michael is shown vanquishing the devil in a painting by 15th-century artist Spanish artist Bartolome Bermejo.

means having a demon living inside.

Individuals, Christian or non-Christian, possess the free will to resist demons, he says.

Kraft believes there is a powerful link between spiritual warfare and inner healing. Everyone has problems. Sometimes, but not always, they are aggravated by a demonic presence, says Kraft.

That's why emotional wounds sometimes fester, no matter how much professional counselling a person receives, he says.

"Deep-level healing is a way of working in the power of the Holy Spirit to restore to health both those who have made bad choices and victims of others," says Kraft.

Kraft chooses to deal with the garbage — emotional or psychological problems — on which demons thrive. Once the garbage has been dealt with by God, then it's far easier to deal the demons a death blow.

"If there are demons, there's always a human problem," says Kraft. "If there's a human problem, there's not always demons."

"If somebody wallows in it, you can bet your money, there'll be a demon who takes advantage of it."

Kraft's interest in demons began while he

was a Christian missionary in Nigeria. One of the questions Nigerians asked him was, "What do you do about evil spirits?"

"I didn't have any idea," he said dur-

ing a lunchtime interview in Okotoks. "I'd never met one I knew of and I wouldn't know what to do with it if I did."

"Can you handle them?" he asked. "No," said the Nigerians.

"Can God handle them?" he then asked.

"Oh, ya," came the answer. "So let's go directly to God and let Him handle the spirits," he said.

For many of the world's indigenous religions, evil spirits are powerful and disruptive and require appeasing.

"The idea you could go directly to God and have Him clobber them was a new approach."

Subsequently, Kraft became involved with what since has been termed the Third Wave, a Pentecostal-style movement that came to prominence during the 1980s and was exemplified by the Vineyard fellowships.

He learned how to deal with inner hurts and began teaching others how to do likewise, just as Jesus taught his disciples. It requires no special gifts, he says.

As Kraft progressed, he began to ask two key questions: When did this problem start, and what else was going on in your life when this problem started?

He often noticed that there had usually been some sort of emotional or psychological disruption, at the heart of which were deep-seated grievances, like anger and unforgiveness.

"After you work on inner healing, sooner or later you hit demons," he says. "You hit garbage and they settle in on garbage bins."

"Demons are like rats and rats go for garbage. If you deal with the garbage first, the demons lose their fight."

Humans have authority over demons, says Kraft. Over the years, he's ministered to more than 1,000 people and performed about 700 deliverances. Says Kraft: "You get addicted to the freedom smiles."

Minister casts out demons

CALGARY HERALD

Deliverance minister Charles Kraft dislikes the behaviour so often associated with demons in Hollywood movies, such as writhing and contortions.

In fact, when Kraft undertakes a deliverance, he forbids demons from causing any violence, any throwing up or any other showy behaviour.

One recent Friday afternoon, Kraft sat in the sanctuary of St. Peter's Anglican Church in Okotoks facing a woman in her forties, while a group of about 40 students sat around in a circle watching them.

Kraft began with a series of probing questions that uncovered the woman's past, especially her childhood. Physical abuse, a parent who was alcoholic, death of a close family member.

As personal traumas surfaced, he asked the woman to bring Jesus into the scene to help heal her.

When he was finished examining her background and bringing God's healing love to bear on it, Kraft said to her in a soft, subdued voice, "I think right now I'd like to talk to some demons. Would that be okay?"

The woman nodded. "Okay," said Kraft, "I'm calling you to attention right now. I want you lined up in a line."

One after another he lined up the demons — spirits of shame, guilt, death, hatred, anger, rage, control, self-hatred, self-loathing, self-rejection, self-condemnation.

Then with a command, he removed their rights to help each other.

One by one he began dealing with each spirit.

"Spirit of control. Spirit of control, what right do you have to be there?"

Silence.

"Speak out whatever impressions you get," Kraft told the woman.

"Spirit of control, are you answering me?"

"Yes," said the woman in a tone slightly different from her earlier comments.

"What right do you have to be there?"

Silence.

"Does she want you?"

"No."

"That's a little tough on you, uh?"

"Yes."

"What have you been doing with her life, Control?"

Silence.

"What have you been telling her?"

"Nothing."

The conversation continued. As it did, Kraft commanded the demons — fear, shame, death, guilt, gluttony — one after another, to jump into a sealed box.

Whenever they gave him any guff, he replaced their horns with crosses while poking fun at them.

At one point, he addressed a demon, "Spirit of abuse, are you there?"

"No," came the answer.

"How can you say 'No' if you're not there?" he asked.

The students laughed.

"I'll go," came the response.

More laughter.

Once they were all inside, Kraft called on Jesus.

"Okay now, Jesus, would you separate these spirits from (name withheld) as far as the East is from the West."

"See if you can see what Jesus does with these boxes," he told the woman.

"Now we plant your cross and your empty tomb, Lord, between . . . and the spirits. I forbid any of them to ever come back or to ever send any others."

"I stand on that," said the woman.

"What's he doing with the boxes?" Kraft asked.

"They're gone. It's like there is a real solid foundation there," the woman commented.

Kraft finished the session by asking God to fill the woman with His love.

A week later, the woman, who did not want to be identified, talked about her experience.

Having done some research and watched Kraft in action, the woman said she felt safe undertaking the session.

"I knew there were things in my life that were beyond my control and there had to be something more to it," she said.

Even though outwardly, the woman appeared to be pained by the experience, inwardly she said she was at peace.

"I felt very much in control of the situation. I felt we wouldn't go into any areas that I wouldn't allow."

When the demons started speaking, she said it came from something outside her self. "I recognized that it was my voice being used but to say it was me saying it, no it wasn't. It wasn't a part of me that verbalized it."

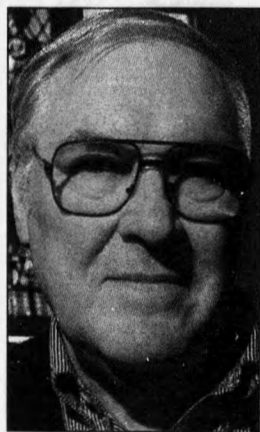
She says it felt as if there were Pacmen jumping around inside her trying to decide whether to stay or go.

"As more authority was exercised, then they knew they had to go. It seemed to me they were playing this game until they finally had no choice but to go."

The woman says that although she believed in demons before the deliverance, she had no idea how much authority they had over her life.

"There's definitely a freedom."

QUOTABLE



"Demons are like rats and rats go for garbage. If you deal with the garbage first, the demons lose their fight."

CHARLES KRAFT



During the past few years, we've all been touched by some of the stories from Chicken Soup for the Soul, a series of books by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen filled with inspiring tales designed to nurture the soul.

This year, the Herald is planning to publish a collection of Christmas Stories for the Soul in its Christmas Eve edition and we need your help.

We'd like to hear your most inspiring Christmas story.

It must be true and something that will warm and encourage the hearts of our readers by demonstrating the spirit of Christmas.

We'd especially like stories that have a religious or spiritual dimension to them, but it isn't absolutely necessary.

Your story should be no longer than two double-spaced pages.

We will edit and publish the best stories in the Herald's Christmas Eve edition.

Please send your submissions to the attention of Gordon Legge, Religion Editor, The Herald, P.O. Box 2400, Station M, Calgary, AB, T2P 0W8; or fax it to Gordon Legge's attention, 403-235-7379; or e-mail Gordon Legge at: leggeg@theherald.southam.ca

Please include your name, address and telephone numbers where you can be reached either during the day or in the evening.

Deadline for submissions is Dec. 9.