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ME 845A Power Encounter

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March 15, 1988

Critique/Evaluation of my Reading

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Critique/Evaluation of my Reading

Taking ME 845A (Power Encounter) was my first real and systematic exposure to the subjects of angels, demons, Satan, spiritual warfare, etc. For that reason it was good to begin my reading on these subjects with a book like *The Authority of the Believer* by John A. MacMillian. Not only is it important to understand the nature and reality of the spiritual warfare that we are all involved in, it is also important to understand how our position in Christ relates to it. MacMillian's book did a good job in helping me to understand some of these basics before delving into more technical material.

***The Authority of the Believer* by John A. MacMillian**

As MacMillian points out, it is important for Christians to understand that spiritual authority, like victory over the power of sin (Romans 6:11), is not something for an elite group of believers (p.10). His discussion of the difference between “power” and “authority” (p.11-13) was very helpful. Like the policeman who is able to stop traffic, not because he has the power to do so but because he has been invested with the necessary authority, Christians are also given authority over the powers of darkness by the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:19a-23). This is accomplished by God who “raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...” (Ephesians 2:6). Although all Christians are given this authority it remains for them to use it according to the will of God. This helped me to see that I need to be ready to exercise my authority in Christ against Satan and his demons.

In his discussion of the phrases in the Bible that refer to the powers of darkness (p.20-21) MacMillian made a very interesting observation. He said that wicked spirits are present at religious gatherings where they look for opportunities to gain control of the wills of people who open themselves “with abandon” to “whatever spiritual force” that approaches! This seems to agree with discussions in class in which it was stressed that all spirits need to be tested as per the instructions found in I John 4:1-3. We must be careful to not open ourselves up to the spiritual influence of anything except that which comes from God. I am reminded of an acquaintance in college who began to have serious emotional and spiritual problems after an extended time of personal prayer and meditation in which he sought to be completely open to the Holy Spirit. At

the time no one seemed to be able to explain the changes he exhibited after that time. Even after professional counseling he still had a problem with suicidal tendencies. As I look back now I wonder if he did not open himself up to an evil spirit by not specifically seeking God (and him only) and then by not testing the spirit of anything that might have come to him.

Another enlightening theme in MacMillian's book is the idea that God did not give us authority over the powers of darkness for the purpose of defense only but also for *offense* by declaring “the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:9-11) (p.23). This is to be done both now as we exercise the authority we have been given in Christ and also in the world to come when we will reign with Christ forever (II Timothy 2:12, Revelation 5:10, 22:5)!

I have often heard that we are to appropriate the spiritual armor of God of Eph. 6:13-17 but I have never understood how to do that. MacMillian offered some very helpful ideas about what the individual items symbolize and, therefore, how to use them (p.42-44). He says that different part of the armor symbolize different attitudes the believer should have. For example, “the belt of truth” refers to having a “clear understanding of the Word of God.” This implies that to put on the “belt of truth” means to seriously study and absorb the truths found in the Bible, etc.

On page 78 MacMillian reminds us that Satan's persecutions are only possible because God gives him the permission (see Rev. 13:7, 15, etc. - “he was given...”). This might not reassure us completely because Satan seems to have permission to do quite a lot! But there are limitations to what he can do. He does not have “free reign” to do whatever he pleases. God is still in control!

Although I liked most of the book, I disagree with MacMillian on an issue that does not seem to form a majority of his thinking and I may even misunderstand his point. On page 73 he seems to express a view of prayer that is not found in the Bible. He writes, “As they speak the word of command, God obeys.” Nowhere does the Bible say that God will *obey* our commands! I think that his statement was a little strong! It might be true that God does nothing except in response to prayer (even that might even be a bit strong) but it certainly is not true that God is at our *command*.

***Demons in the World Today* by Merrill F. Unger**

I found *Demons in the World Today* by Merrill F. Unger to be a very informative book. His approach to the subject of demons and their influences is a more theological and systematic one. His exhaustive survey (including many technical terms and their meanings—p.38f) creates a valuable reference tool which will be useful to me in the future. He also provides extensive documentation for what he says. This makes his statements more authoritative as he draws on many sources and looks to Scripture to explain human experiences.

It was interesting that on page 11 he suggests that in all religions, belief in evil spirits is universal! This provides a somewhat humbling corrective to us Christians in the materialistic west who have lost sight of the spiritual realm and who tend to ignore the possibility of evil spirits influencing our daily lives. For example, Unger suggests that certain compulsive behavior as well as behavior that causes a person to “plunge” themselves into evil may both be the result of demonic influences. His arguments caused me to be more open minded by giving me new categories by which to examine and understand the world. I had never really realized just how much I had “bought into” the materialism of our society. On page 18 he even suggests that millions of people are suffering from the influence of the demonic realm! This impressed me with the very urgent need of counselors and psychiatrists who are willing and equipped to deal with patients whose problems may be the result of demonic influences.

Unger (p.101f as well as class discussions) also helped clear up another misconception on my part. I had assumed that demonic influence was either “on” or “off”; totally present or totally absent. It was helpful to learn that demonic influence can occur to any degree on a continuum between mild influence and total enslavement and control (if not of the whole person at least in certain areas one's life).

Another interesting point was that endowment with magical powers and corresponding occult enslavement may be the result of *heredity*! On page 81 he writes, “...demonic worship involves the punishment of God to the third and fourth generations...” This apparently agrees both with Scripture (Exodus 20:5 - “I the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me...”) and with the experiences of those who counsel such people.

It is not surprising that Satan can and does cause disease, etc. but it was somewhat of a surprise to learn that he apes the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of strengthening the occult enslavement of those who are deceived by him. “Their objective is not to bring liberation” but to deceive and enslave (p.111). This again stresses the importance of testing the spirits (I John) and rejecting anything (even healing and other things that might “look good”) that is not of God! Physical healing that is accomplished through demonic power merely results in a shift of the problem from the physical to the psychological. Healing through the all-loving Son of God is the only way to possess healing that does not have a hidden cost. Unger writes, “Real deliverance can only be achieved through the gospel of Christ and faith in his conquest over all the powers of darkness” (p.95). In chapter 7, where he concentrates on the subject of demonic healing, he says that demonic healing can even be done using the name of God and the Bible! In this instance God is not sought for the healing but power is thought to be associated with the particular *words* themselves. This a very sobering thought and reminds me of Matthew 7:21-23 which says that it is possible to prophesy, drive out demons and perform miracles in the name of the Lord and still be sent away from God's presence as an evildoer. We certainly must be alert to Satan's deceptions (I Peter 5:8)!

Although, as Unger writes, demons can “enslave and oppress fallen man only to the degree he willingly violates the eternal moral law of God and exposes himself to evil” (p.114) it is virtually beyond dispute that even Christians can become severely oppressed by demons. It seems that every position on the continuum of demonic influence is possible for a Christian to experience except actual “possession.” This is possible because of ignorance and deliberate sin (p.183-187). Christians need to rely on God's power, use the armor of God (Eph. 6), and walk by faith (II Cor. 5:7).

One issue that Unger brought up in two different places (p.68, 189) is his assertion that “revelatory gifts” (prophecy, tongues, etc.) have ceased since the completion of the New Testament. He bases this on I Cor. 13:8-10 and a very precarious understanding that “the perfect” refers to the completion of the Canon! I must disagree with his exegesis on this point. I believe that the “revelatory gifts” are still valid for today.

***Bothered? Bewildered? Bewitched?* by Grayson H. Enson and Edward Howe**

Bothered? Bewildered? Bewitched? by Grayson H. Enson and Edward Howe is mainly based on experiential knowledge and is therefore able to offer a lot of very practical advice and needed warnings for working with Christians who suffer from demonic influences. Much of the material will serve as a valuable reference tool for practical concerns. For example, chapter 10 describes the actual step-by-step procedure for a deliverance session including appropriate warnings and practical suggestions such as the importance of working with at least one or two other people, etc. The book also provided many helpful case studies that not only illustrate the methods that Ensign and Howe used but also made the possibility of demonic influence in and around me more vivid and real! I took chapter 15 about cautions for those in this ministry very seriously.

Ensign's and Howe's holistic approach to health (including chapter 12—their nutritional concerns) was very balanced. This emphasis to treat the *whole* person helps us keep a balance so that we are “not looking for demons under every rock.” Dealing only with demons in counseling sessions would require the huge assumption that all problems are the direct result of demonic influence. This approach would not be able to account for the other possibilities such as problems resulting from the consequence of sin, ignorance, chemical imbalances, etc. and the fact that God normally uses means to heal people and holds them responsible for certain things (p.42). This means that going to a doctor does not mean that we have “bypassed our dependence on God” (p.43). This idea is important in that it is God who provides the wisdom and the skill of the doctors and also the healing processes which he has built into the human body which can be enhanced by the addition of certain chemicals. Indeed, medicines might well be the answer to the prayers for the healing of a sick person!

On pages 60 and following, Ensign and Howe give an in-depth discussion of James 5:14ff. They use it to support their use of olive oil in their counseling/deliverance sessions. I basically agree with their understanding of the passage except for their interpretation that the “oil” acts as a “means of grace” (p.68). It is understandable that they have opted for that option considering their background (Church of Christ) but I think that it is preferable to understand the “oil” as an aid to faith or as a symbol of the power of the Holy Spirit (because of my own background?!). Another problem I have with their understanding of the passage is that although they see this

passage as applying to all forms of healing (physical, spiritual, etc.) they seem to think that it is the *only* proper procedure. The examples of Jesus in the gospels and of the apostles in Acts do not seem to follow the procedure in James. My understanding is that many people have been involved in deliverance ministries much broader than in just the local church and have been used mightily by God to minister to his people. But I do agree that the procedure of calling the elders of one's local church is to be the preferred way.

Chapter 8 deals with a very interesting topic: the healing of psychological hurts and memories (i.e. "inner healing"). Again, they describe the procedure that has worked well for them. They also give some results by sighting specific case studies (p.121f). I think that this could provide a very valuable function in our churches as many people are no doubt suffering from the effects of abuse as children, sin, etc. Such a ministry would definitely fulfill the command to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2).

One of the key factors in forming my understanding of demonic influences is the fact that people can give legal rights (grounds) to the demons so that they acquire varying degrees of control over the person in certain areas of their lives (p.136, 146, 150). This can occur both before a person becomes a Christian *and after*. These "grounds" must be renounced by the person seeking deliverance or the demons will come right back. Ensign and Howe warn against wasting time with people who seem to be "revolving door" for demons (p.184). Even when there is nothing in the victim's life that might hinder the deliverance, total freedom might take many sessions and the sessions may require great patience as the demons resist. They emphasize the importance of total dependence on God for the deliverance and warn against pride.

On page 200f Ensign and Howe write about their involvement with counseling children. The ignorance of the church on the subject of spiritual warfare can greatly endanger our children. Parents need to understand the responsibility they have for their children not just to feed them and clothe them, etc. but also to protect them from the powers of darkness. Apparently grounds can be given to the demons to oppress children on the basis of "The Law of Generations" (Ex. 20:5), parents who have conceived their child by committing fornication, mothers who have previously had an abortion, and hate for the unborn and unwanted child. These things need to be avoided not only for the sake of our Holy God and our own obedience but also for the sake of

our children. We need to claim our children for the Lord as soon as we know that we are “expecting!”

One item that Ensign and Howe briefly mentioned was the use of the transference method by some people in the deliverance ministry (p.245f). I could not believe that anyone would every have attempted such a thing! Why anyone would believe that God would require its use in order to free a person is beyond me. I think that Ensign and Howe should have been more forceful than just to say, “it *may* cause spiritual harm to those involved” (p.246). Inviting the invasion by demons could only be asking for trouble. I do not know of anything in Scripture that could be used to support this approach and their certainly are no examples of it.

Touch the World Through Prayer by Wesley L. Duewel

In *Touch the World Through Prayer* by Wesley L. Duewel there are six chapters (14,15,16,17,26, and 28) that deal specifically with subjects relating to “power encounter.” He writes as a missionary who is interested in prayer as spiritual warfare as it effects the accomplishing of God's will especially in missions and evangelism.

One of the most important things that I was made aware of this quarter is also mentioned by Duewel on page 104. That is that Satan can only be in one place at any one time. He is not omnipotent like God. I must have believed his lie because I assumed, without thinking, that he was able to be everywhere. (Although, my thinking may have been influenced by the convention of referring to anything that relates to the powers of darkness as “Satan.” Even Duewel says, “When we speak of binding Satan, we mean binding Satan's power, which is usually exercised through demons” (p.104)). This was a real revelation for me!

Chapter 16 deals with “power encounter” as a way of spreading the gospel in areas of the world that are “power” oriented. Through the answering of prayer concerning the needs of the people being witnessed to Christ is seen as being the Most Powerful God—more powerful than the spirits that they have been enslaved to (p.125)! We can even pray from here that God would perform “power encounters” in pioneer areas of the world in order for people to come to him and be saved!

Duewel gives a step-by-step description of how to bind Satan in chapter 17. Although I realize that Duewel is mainly concerned about the subject of prayer I am concerned about the seemingly shallow treatment of deliverance he describes as opposed to the methods offered in class and in Ensign and Howe. He does not deal with counseling, trying to determine the grounds by which the demon(s) may have gained access, or with trying to determine their names, etc. However, the variation might be due to the different situations that are expected by each method. For example, Duewel seem to be mainly addressing missionaries who are dealing with “power encounters” in the field (he cites an example on p.134 which took place in India) while Ensign and Howe seem to address the needs of people here in the States. It seems that different cultures might affect the method of the deliverance session. I need to remember to take that into consideration depending on where I minister.

Duewel's last major emphasis on this subject is found in chapter 28 which deals with being a “prayer warrior.” This is the process of applying prayer (the weapon of attack) against the strongholds of Satan (II Cor. 10:4-5). He says that we are not just “to hold down the fort” until Jesus comes (p.209) but we are to take the offensive against the forces of evil because the gates of Hades will not prove stronger than the church (Matt. 16:18). I think he is right in saying that we are not only to resist Satan (being on the defensive) but we are to retake the “ground” Satan has stolen from the Lord. *We are the Lord's army* (II Timothy 2:4)!

If there has been one thing impressed upon my mind this quarter both through class discussions and my reading it is the importance of adopting a Biblical worldview by which to see and understand the world around us. The Church needs to be made aware of the reality of the invisible (and sometimes not so invisible!) war that we are all involved in whether we want to be or not. Christ has already attained the ultimate victory by his cross but now it is up to us to glorify him as we by faith appropriate it daily in his name against the evil one who seeks to destroy us.