

## **Bugenhagen, Luther, and Chemnitz on Demonic Possession and Exorcism**

On the day of the festival of Simon and Judas we arrived safely, by the grace of God, in Lübeck. Once I had gotten there the Devil gave public notice of himself and was recognized in a possessed girl, who, until this time, had been quite well. Before this, his presence in her was doubted, but now he claimed openly to be there and to have entered the young girl through an old woman's curse. The girl had reminded the old woman (the Devil claimed) of a pound which she still owed her, to which the woman responded: "I'll send the Devil into your body."

I was with the girl today, who was well again. Because they feared that the Devil might return, the parents were still concerned. Her parents told me what else the Devil had said: "Aren't there enough preachers here? Why is it that you had to call one from Wittenberg?" He also said: "Bugenhagen has come. I know him well, and have often been with him, etc." When I had heard this from the girl's father, in her presence, I laughed and was reminded of the verse in Acts 19: "Jesus I know well and Paul I know well, etc." It is quite true that he has often tempted me and bothered me with his thousand tricks, trying to disprove my teaching and faith, but because of Christ, who helped me by His grace, he was not able to achieve anything except to provoke me to do battle with him. I have still not forgotten what he tried to do through the Silesian Sacramentalists, etc. In other sins it has seemed as if he was defeating me. But, Christ be thanked, though he was pleased to visit me, he was not pleased to stay. I would remind you again to pray for me in this matter, etc.

But to return to the situation: I asked the girl, who is about eighteen years old and continually bed-ridden, if, after she had come to herself again and was feeling well, she was aware of the way in which she had cursed and mocked. She answered no, that she knew nothing of this. Her parents told me the same thing. They, too, had questioned her when she had regained her senses as to why she had mocked so terribly. She had answered them: "I didn't do it, it was the Devil in me; but I have no idea what I did." They also told me the following: Yesterday, while the Devil was torturing her, the father began to quote to her from the Word of God, and, when that did not help, he took a copy of the German New Testament and held it in front of her. She, however, turned her face away and began biting the pillow that was under her head, etc. I spoke for a while with the girl and she gave proper Christian answers and a good understanding of her baptism. I was especially concerned to convince her not to get the idea that she was forced to belong to the Devil simply because he had tortured her, etc. Finally, I knelt, along with all who were present, laid my hands on her head, and prayed. She thanked me as I was leaving.

While I was writing this letter, however, a messenger came and told me that the Devil had tortured the girl again, had thrown her naked out of bed, and under a table, and then under a chair, and had twisted her neck so badly that she would have died had not her father quickly come to help. The girl's parents pleaded that I should come. So I went, and, as I arrived in front of the house, I heard a loud scream. When I entered and reached the possessed girl I heard with my own ears these words: "Bugenhagen the traitor is coming! Oh the traitor, he wants to torture me and will not allow me to remain! Oh, I must go out!" I stood there dumbfounded, and even though I did not believe the liar, I nevertheless interpreted his words to refer not only to the possessed girl, but to the entire city; that is, that I would not tolerate the Devil's kingdom in it. May the God of all mercy permit and accomplish this through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

All those present claimed that the girl had not formerly known my name, and added that she had mocked horribly before I had entered the house. Now when she screamed, I yelled back and

called her by name: “Elizabeth!” The Devil answered: “Elizabeth, Elizabeth.” Then I said: “Yes, are you trying to deny it? Why shouldn’t I call you Elizabeth? You gave me testimony today that you received that very same name in baptism, by which we are baptized into Christ.” He then began to pounce about, screaming so loudly that those present could not hear each other. But I fell to my knees and prayed earnestly with the intensity which the girl’s misery and despair wrung out of me, speaking loudly so that all could hear, that the Lord Jesus should free her – for He had said, “In my name they will drive out devils.” I think that the others were praying with me since I had turned my back to them. Meanwhile the Devil screamed: “I must go out! Oh I must go out!”, and tortured the girl horribly. But her father held her. Immediately after this she lay still, so that her father no longer had to hold her. She lay there, breathing heavily as if she was about to depart. Meanwhile the father told me what the Devil had said to him yesterday before I had arrived: “You doubt that I am present! Now look, I have given you a clear sign!” He pointed to a hole in the window which he had broken. “That,” said he, “is how I entered, etc.”

Though the girl’s body was still moving, we were afraid that she was slipping away. While I sat and waited to see what would happen, she opened her eyes just as if she was awakening from sleep. I spoke to her with a quiet voice: “Elizabeth!” She answered: “What?” I continued: “Do you know what you have done and the way in which you mocked?” She answered: “No.” So I reminded her in the same way I had earlier in the day. Then I knelt and prayed with my hands on her head that she should be free, etc. Having finished praying, I asked her to say the Amen. This she did willingly.

And so I left; but I have been told that the Devil tortured her again that night, just as we read in the Gospel concerning the swine, etc., and screamed: “I must go out, but where shall be my habitation? There is a horse in Lünenburg; I will enter it, or perhaps the chain-maker.” Now the girl’s father was of the same profession and was, as we say, an adventurous man, since, to my surprise, he had spoken to me without fear from the start, as soon as he was certain that it was the Devil. Said he: “If it weren’t a sin there’s a lot I would ask the scoundrel and he would have to answer it all.” I, however, forbade him to ask anything secretly of the Tempter or to allow it of anyone else. I did not ask what else had happened.

I am puzzled that Satan can confuse people this way. But no matter what he does or says, he still shows that he is a stupid and condemned spirit. These things happened on the eve of All Saints Day, in the year 1530. May God graciously give us the victory against all of [the Devil’s] fiery darts through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Johannes Bugenhagen, Letter to the Wittenberg Theologians [November 1, 1530], in John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers* [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973], pp. 181-83)

We should not now and also cannot drive out the devils with certain ceremonies and words as the prophets, Christ, and the apostles once did. We should *pray* in the name of Jesus Christ, earnestly admonish the church to pray that the dear God and Father of our dear Lord Jesus Christ might redeem the possessed person by His mercy. If only such prayer is done with faith in the promise of Christ in John 16:23, then it is strong and powerful, so that the devil must leave the person. I could cite countless examples of this. We cannot drive out evil spirits in any other way, nor do we have the ability to do it. The poor people possessed by the devil during the papacy were not freed from their evil, burdensome spirits by the art, words, and gestures which the exorcists used. He does not permit himself to be driven out with plain words such as “Depart, you unclean spirit!” Thus the exorcists were also not serious about it. The power of God must do it, and one must risk his life, so that the devil makes him rather fearful. Without terror it wont go away. (Martin Luther, Table Talk #1170 [1530], quoted in C. F. W. Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology* [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017], pp. 344-45. Emphasis in original.)

People are possessed [by the devil] in two ways: some corporally, according to their [external] humanity, and others spiritually, according to their spirit [or soul], as is the case with all the godless. In those who are corporally possessed and frenzied, the devil inhabits and vexes only the body, not the soul. So the soul remains secure and unharmed. The demons can be driven out of such people by prayer and fasting. (Martin Luther, Table Talk #1170 [1530], quoted in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 58 [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010], p. 75)

Either the devil is driven out by the prayer of the whole Church – thus when all Christians offer and link together a prayer that is so strong and powerful that it penetrates through the clouds and is heard; or, on the other hand, the one who drives out the evil foe must be highly enlightened in his spirit and have a strong, firm courage like Elijah, Elisha, Peter, Paul, etc., so that the matter is certain. But when the devil was driven out by papistic monks and the priest exorcists and left a sign behind – perhaps a pane of glass or a window broken out, or a piece of the wall torn – he did this to fool the people who did not know any differently [into believing] that he had departed, since he no longer bothered the possessed person, all with the intention of possessing the people later by such smoke and mirrors [literally “fencing with a mirror”], but in an entirely different way (namely, *spiritually*), and strengthening them in their superstition. Thus in St. Cyriacus Church in the cloister at Wimmelburg, situated not far from Eisleben, where there was a great pilgrimage and gathering, it also happened that a monk, a good drinker, commanded a possessed person to open his mouth, let him put two fingers in it, and yet not bite him, and this happened. He also commanded the devil to depart when the little bell of St. Cyriacus was rung; the rogue did it, too, in order to strengthen the poor people in the delusion and error that the little bell was so holy that the devil had to depart at its sound, and thus entirely exterminated faith in Christ. (Martin Luther, Table Talk #830, quoted in C. F. W. Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, p. 345. Emphasis in original.)

A brother in the Lord brought me your letter, and with it your question concerning a certain woman who is plagued by the devil. I am compelled to write briefly because I am burdened with a great number of other obligations. But since Theobald Diedelhuber, who is to be the bearer of this letter, is here, I wish to reply, even if for no other reason than to commend him to you.

The first thing you and your congregation ought to do is this: Pray fervently and oppose Satan with your faith, no matter how stubbornly he resists. About ten years ago we had an experience in this neighborhood with a very wicked demon, but we succeeded in subduing him by perseverance and by unceasing prayer and unquestioning faith. The same will happen among you if you continue in Christ's name to despise that derisive and arrogant spirit and do not cease praying. By this means I have restrained many similar spirits in different places, for the prayer of the Church prevails at last. Consequently you should have no doubt, if you pray in truth and with perseverance, that this wicked spirit will be humbled.

The second thing is this: Carefully investigate whether that woman might be practicing some fraud by means of which all of you could be made objects of ridicule. In my own experience (apart entirely from what I have read in books) I have encountered such frauds, and afterward I reproached myself for my simplicity. The evil spirit takes delight (as he did from the beginning with Adam) in using a woman to make a fool of a man – if he cannot make him godless, as he much prefers to do. In short, whatever it is, whether it be in this woman or in others whom you mention, whether it be in the form of an incubus, a succubus, or other monstrosities, we nevertheless know that it is the devil. Therefore, we should not be inattentive and casual with regard to his fabrications and deeds, his realities and apparitions, but should fight against him with faith and prayer. The one whom he crucified lives. And by his own power the crucified One again triumphed over his crucifier in order that in the former we may triumph over the latter. (Martin Luther, Letter to Bernard Wurzelmann

[November 2, 1535], *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960], pp. 42-43)

What you write appears incredible to many. When, before you wrote to me, this case was reported here, I too thought that I was listening to a joke or a fable. But if things are as you write, I believe that this is to be taken as a sign that God is permitting Satan to imitate and portray the practice of certain princes who are everywhere robbing and devouring wealth without accomplishing anything.

Inasmuch as you have to do here with a jocular spirit who in his leisure pokes fun at our security, we must first of all pray earnestly for the girl who is compelled to suffer such things on our account. In the second place, this spirit must in turn be ridiculed and derided, but he must not be attacked with any exorcisms or serious measures, for he laughs at all these things with diabolical scorn. We must persevere in our prayer for the girl and our contempt of the devil until finally, Christ permitting, he lets her alone. It would also be good if the princes who are accused by this sign would lay aside their vices, for the evil spirit indicates that he controls them mightily and securely.

I pray you, since the case deserves it, that you publish an account of it and that you investigate everything carefully to discover whether any deception is being practiced, especially whether the money or coins which the girl takes feel hard in the hands of others and are of the kind that can be used in the market place. For I have before been harassed by so many dissimulations, artifices, frauds, lies, tricks, etc., that I am necessarily reluctant to believe everything and everybody; I must believe only what I know I have myself done and said. Such is the power of the devil, the wickedness of the world, and the impudence of men today! Wherefore watch and be careful lest you too are deceived and I am led astray by you. As the proverb puts it, "Let experience be your guide." (Martin Luther, Letter to Andrew Ebert [August 5, 1536], *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, pp. 44-45) *Note: Luther is here responding to a letter from Andrew Ebert, a preacher in Frankfurt on the Oder, in which Ebert had expressed his belief that a girl in his parish was possessed by the devil, and in which he had asked for Luther's advice on what could be done to help her. Ebert reported that the girl snatched small coins from tables, or from the sleeves, coats, or beards of people who were standing nearby; that she placed these coins in her mouth; and that she chewed and swallowed them. He also reported that she had begun to speak in a German dialect that she had not known before. Luther was likewise informed that a Roman priest had come from a neighboring town, and had made use of consecrated herbs, holy water, and exorcism, but had failed to cure the girl.*

...all the wretchedness and misery rampant in the world is the work of the devil, who delights in bringing ruin and death on man; for it was he who plunged all human nature into sin and death. But, as we learn from 1 John 3:8, "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" and to re-establish the divine works of life. This He proved so forcefully that even the Jews had to admit grudgingly that no man could perform such works. And even though they declared that no one but God could forgive sin, still His works stood before their eyes in testimony that He had this divine power and that He was the Man who could help man from death to life, against sin to righteousness, from strife to peace and every good. Thus we become assured not only of the doctrine that Christ is true God with the Father, but also that He is a merciful God and Savior; and we can recognize and apprehend the Father's heart and will in all the works of the Lord Christ, for the true and blessed consolation of all wretched and aggrieved hearts and consciences. "Thus," says Christ, "My works will aptly demonstrate to you that the Father is in Me and wants to be known through Me."

But you say: "After all, the devil can work miracles and signs like Christ's. How, then, can we found our belief on the miracles of Christ?" It is true that the devil can torment people and lay

them low; or he can blind them temporarily or lame a member, as he often did through his witches and devilish whores, and then heal them again. Not that these people were really blind or lame, for to such he could not restore sight or a member; but he bewitches the people and dupes their five senses, so that they do not know better and are willing to swear an oath that it is real.

At times the devil also takes possession of a person and then lets himself be cast out by adjuration, blessing, etc. All this he does for the purpose of confirming his lies and deceptions and of impressing the people, so that because of these apparently great miracles they are seduced into idolatry. This he has accomplished to date with pilgrimages and the idolatrous adoration of saints, at one place with the Sacred Blood, at another with this or that Mary. He has filled the entire country with shameful delusions and has prompted people to throng to such places and everybody to make vows there and transfer their trust from God to his lies. For in the end it was nothing but devilish deception with which he made fools of the people and persuaded them to believe that they had really been helped. (Martin Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John" [1537], *Luther's Works*, Vol. 24 [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961], pp. 73-75)

The tax collector in Torgau and the councilor in Belgern have written me to ask that I offer some good advice and help for Mrs. John Korner's afflicted husband. I know of no worldly help to give. If the physicians are at a loss to find a remedy, you may be sure that it is not a case of ordinary melancholy. It must, rather, be an affliction that comes from the devil, and must be counteracted by the power of Christ and with the prayer of faith. This is what we do, and what we have been accustomed to do, for a cabinetmaker here was similarly afflicted with madness and we cured him by prayer in Christ's name.

Accordingly you should proceed as follows: Go to him with the deacon [assistant preacher] and two or three good men. Confident that you, as pastor of the place, are clothed with the authority of the ministerial office, lay your hands upon him and say, "Peace be with you, dear brother, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ." Thereupon repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer over him in a clear voice, and close with these words: "O God, almighty Father, who hast told us through thy Son, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you' [John 16:23]; who hast commanded and encouraged us to pray in his name, 'Ask, and ye shall receive' [John 16:24]; and who in like manner hast said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me' [Psalm 50:15]; we unworthy sinners, relying on these thy words and commands, pray for thy mercy with such faith as we can muster. Graciously deign to free this man from all evil, and put to nought the work that Satan has done in him, to the honor of thy name and the strengthening of the faith of believers; through the same Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, world without end. Amen." Then, when you depart, lay your hands upon the man again and say, "These signs shall follow them that believe; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" [Mark 16:17-18].

Do this three times, once on each of three successive days. Meanwhile let prayers be said from the chancel of the church, publicly, until God hears them.

Insofar as we are able, we shall at the same time unite our faithful prayers and petitions to the Lord with yours.

Farewell. Other counsel than this I do not have. (Martin Luther, Letter to Severin Schulze [June 1, 1545], *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 52)

Something is also to be said here (because the Gospel reading [Luke 24:36-47] mentions it) about appearing or wandering spirits. Here we see that the Jewish people and the apostles themselves held that spirits stray about and are seen at night and otherwise. When the disciples were in the ship at night and saw Jesus walking on the sea, they were frightened as of a ghost and cried out in fear

(Matthew 14[:24-26]). In this passage we hear that Christ does not deny it but confirms with His answer that spirits do appear, because He says, “A spirit does not have flesh or bones,” etc. [Luke 24:39].

However, Scripture does not say or give any example that these are the souls of dead people and that they wander among people and seek help, as we believed previously in our blindness, deceived by the devil. Because of this the pope has invented purgatory and set up his shameful trafficking in Masses. We may easily regard this lying doctrine and abomination as the fruit, which is also the consequence of that on which it is built, namely, the wandering souls, which comes from the father of lies, the devil [John 8:44], who has deceived the people in the name of dead men.

We have reason enough not to believe such apparitions of spirits straying about under the name of souls. First, Scripture says nothing anywhere about the souls of dead men who have not yet risen going about among the people, though everything else we need to know is sufficiently revealed in Scripture. He wanted us to know not even one word (it is not even possible for us to grasp and understand) about what happens with spirits which have departed from the body before the resurrection and the Last Day, since they are now divided and separated completely from the world and from this time. Second, it is clearly forbidden in Scripture to ask anything of the dead or to believe them (Deuteronomy 18[:10-12]; Isaiah 8[:19-20]). It is pointed out in Luke 16[:29, 31] that God does not want any to rise from the dead or to preach, because Moses and the Scriptures are present.

Therefore, we should know that all those ghosts and apparitions which are seen or heard, especially with rumbling and rattling, are not the souls of men, but surely devils who are playing either at deceiving the people with false claims and lies or at frightening and afflicting them in vain. Therefore, a Christian should act toward these ghosts who pretend to be souls no differently than toward the real devil. He should be equipped with God’s Word and faith so that he is not confused or frightened but remains with the doctrine he has learned and confessed from the Gospel about Christ and cheerfully despises the devil with his rattling. He also should not remain for long where he perceives that people trust in Christ and despise him. I say this so that we will be wise and not let ourselves be misled again by such deception and lies, since he previously deceived and fooled even excellent people such as St. Gregory by claiming to be a soul. (Martin Luther, “Gospel for Easter Tuesday,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 77 [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014], pp. 78-79)

...be wise enough to know that God does not want us to know anything about what happens with the dead, so that faith, which believes that after this life God saves the believers and condemns the unbelievers, may have free course through God’s Word. Now, if a poltergeist should visit you, pay no attention to him, and be certain that it is the devil. Hit him with the words of Abraham: “They have Moses and the prophets” [Luke 16:29]; and, likewise, with the command of God: “You should inquire nothing of the dead” (Deuteronomy 18 [:11]). Then he will soon shuffle away. If he does not shuffle away, then let him make noise until he tires of it, and tolerate his wantonness for God’s sake in firm faith.

If it were possible that there were even one soul or good spirit, then you should still neither learn nor ask anything of him, since God has forbidden it. He sent His Son Himself to teach us everything that is necessary for us to know. What He has not taught us we should not want to know; we can be content with the teachings of the holy apostles, through whom He has preached to us. ...

As an example of this, we read in the *Historia Tripartita* about a bishop who came to Corinth to attend the council. When he did not find suitable lodging for himself and his servants, he saw a deserted house locked up and asked if he could not lodge there. He was told that it was so frightful inside that no one could dwell in it and that many times people were found dead in it in the morning. Then he said nothing, but bid them enter immediately and spent the night inside. He saw clearly that it was the devil’s ghost, and he had a firm faith that Christ was the devil’s Lord; therefore, he

despised him and went in to him. Then, through his praying and lodging there, the house was set free, so that from then on no rumbling or monsters were heard in it. So you see that the rumbling spirits are devils, and there is no reason to debate with them; rather, we should despise them with a cheerful faith, as if they were nothing.

Likewise, we read that Bishop Gregory of Cappadocia crossed the Alps and lodged with a heathen sacristan or sexton who had an idol which answered what he asked. The man supported himself with this business of telling the people secret things. Now, the bishop knew nothing about this and in the morning went on his way. However, the devil could not tolerate the holy man's prayers and presence and fled from the house, so that the sexton from then on could no longer prophesy as before. When he now called to his idol and yelled about his loss, the devil appeared to him in his sleep and said that it was his fault because he had lodged the bishop, with whom he could not remain. The sexton hurried after the bishop and complained to him that he had driven away his false god and livelihood and returned poor thanks for his lodging. Then the bishop took paper and briefly wrote: "Gregory to Apollo, my greetings. I permit you to do what you did before. Farewell." The sexton took the letter and placed it by his idol; then the devil returned and did as before. Finally, the sexton thought: "What an insignificant god I have, who lets himself be forced and controlled by this guest who is a man!" He went to the bishop, was instructed and baptized, and so advanced that he became an admirable bishop at Caesarea in Cappadocia after this bishop's death. That is how faith goes about simply and acts so boldly, securely, and powerfully. Treat your poltergeists the same way. (Martin Luther, "Gospel for the First Sunday after Trinity," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 78 [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015], pp. 65-67)

Because we are Christians, we should really know henceforth the devil's thoughts, and believe that the poltergeists are not the souls of men but simply devils who act and speak as if one could redeem them; that they make a jest and mockery out of the holy sacrament and testament of God, extinguish the faith, and try to establish and buttress that abominable rummage sale of the mass (which has now taken the upper hand everywhere). Try this. Show your faith. And you will see that these spirits will immediately cease from their foolishness and spookery.

If all this fails to move you to believe nothing unless it is founded in the Scriptures, then be moved by the fact that the Scriptures forbid and condemn communication with the spirits of the dead. In Deut. 18[:9-14] Moses says: "Israel, when you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, see that you do not learn the abominable practices of the people which is now in it. There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, any one who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. All this is an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominable practices your God will annihilate them, etc."

This divine commandment we, like the Jews, have scorned and rejected, when we hear that it is an abomination before God to ask anything of the dead, as if God were not among us, and could not or would not tell us all the things that we should know and have to know, and we are yet dissatisfied with his words. Is it any wonder, therefore, that he deserts us who have deserted his commandment, and lets us fall into error?

See, therefore, that these cannot be good spirits which wish to tell us of the actions and mode of life of the dead. A good spirit is obedient to the commandment of God, who does not wish us to know what happens among the dead. This is why the Holy Spirit himself keeps this commandment of God so strictly that not a single instance of spirits of the dead is found in the entire Scriptures; indeed, they forbid believing these spirits. That Samuel was brought up by a medium or wizard [I Sam. 28:8-14] was surely a spectre of the devil, not only because the Scriptures in that place declare that it was done by a woman who was filled with devils (just as though one ought to believe that the

souls of the saints which are in the hand of God [Wisd. of Sol. 3:1] and in Abraham's bosom [Luke 16:22] were in the power of the devil and of evil persons), but also because Saul and the woman when they inquired of the dead were clearly acting contrary to this divine commandment. Against this commandment the Holy Spirit cannot and may not act, nor let his saints act; nor yet help or approve those who do act against it.

The Scriptures do not expressly state whether it was really Samuel or not; they only call him Samuel. This proves that the Scriptures put the matter as it was in the heart of Saul, who did not know but that it was Samuel; and the spirit skilfully spoke all the words of Samuel and added more to them. The Holy Spirit, however, intends that we should be warned and armed by this commandment, which he had previously delivered and described, so that we might know that whatever happens contrary to it does not proceed from a good spirit or from the children of a good spirit. For similarly in II Sam. 1[:2-16] the Scriptures introduce the servant of Saul who came to David and said that he had slain Saul; and this he related with such an appearance of truth that David believed him and had him put to death because he had slain God's anointed. The Scriptures do not say here whether he is lying or telling the truth, but they wish us to recognize his lies from the passage in the last chapter of I Sam. [31:4] (where they previously described the death of Saul as it occurred). Whoever does not seek it in this place will surely believe that this servant is telling the truth. So also in this counterfeit reawakening of Samuel the Scriptures refer us to the true commandment of God as written in Deut. 18[:11].

This commandment is renewed by Isaiah in chapter 8[:19-20], who says: "And when they say to you: 'Let us consult the mediums and wizards, who chirp in their wizards' way,' then answer: 'Should not a people consult their God? To the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak thus they shall not live to see the morning light.'" Here you see clearly that one should not consult or inquire except from his God, from His law and testimony. Whoever does otherwise will not see the dawn. And it specifically condemns the living who desire to consult and inquire from the dead. It says: "To the dead." That is in the Hebrew style which puts it: "I ask to God, I ask to the dead." In our language that is the same as saying: "I inquire of God, I inquire of the dead." Thus the living asking the dead is the same as the best asking the least; it is like a man taking advice from a piece of wood. Let the people of God inquire of a higher and better source, namely from their God. Not that every person should expect a special answer from heaven, but he should inquire of the Lord his God, in His law, in the Scriptures. And Christ himself confirms this when he tells in Luke 16[:29] how Abraham spoke with the rich man and would not allow anyone to be sent from the dead to the living for the purpose of teaching them, but referred them to the Scriptures, saying: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." This agrees very well with Isaiah [8:20], who refers us to the law and the testimony, by which he has demonstrated sufficiently that when the dead appear to the living it is neither from Clod nor by God's command, and that we should be satisfied with the Scriptures.

Therefore we should with utter confidence hold up before the poltergeists these three witnesses of Scripture: first, Moses, who says: you shall not inquire of the dead [Deut. 18:11]; second, Isaiah [8:19-20]: you shall consult the law and the testimony rather than the dead; third, Abraham and Christ: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them" [Luke 16:29]. And we are not to let ourselves be moved by the great number of vigils, masses or anniversaries, churches and altars, which are all founded and erected upon the words and answers of these poltergeists. For you can see that all of it stands and depends upon the devil's lies and the signs and wonders of false Christs and apostles (which Christ announced beforehand [Matt. 24:24-25]) so that they might fill the world with horrible idolatry which cries to heaven and causes God's last judgment to press closer with great, unbearable wrath. (Martin Luther, "The Misuse of the Mass," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959], pp. 195-98. See Addendum.)

Once, during the life of Dr. Martin Luther, a young woman was brought to Wittenberg who was born in the land of Meissen, who was often vexed and tormented by the devil. And a letter was written to blessed Dr. Martin that he should save and rescue this young woman, who was 18 years old, from the evil spirit. When this virgin was brought to Dr. Martin, he asked her at that time whether she could say her faith [the creed]. She answered, "Yes." Then the blessed Dr. Martin commanded her to say it. As she now began and came to the article [of the creed] and these words, "And I believe in Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son, our Lord," she could no longer speak, but the evil spirit began to convulse and torment her. Then Dr. Luther spoke, "I know you well, you devil. You would really like it if someone would set up a big ceremony with you and celebrate you greatly. You will find none of that with me." Then he commanded that she be brought to his sermon in the church on the next day, and afterwards be brought into the sacristy, and he told the other servants of the church to come into the sacristy in addition.

The virgin was obedient and came to the sermon of the doctor, but afterwards, when they wanted to bring her into the sacristy, she fell down and struck and convulsed around, so that several students had to carry her into the sacristy and lay her at the feet of blessed Dr. Martin, and they locked the door to the sacristy, and all the servants of the church with several students stayed therein.

Then Dr. Martin began, and made this short admonition to the servants of the Church, which should be well observed by all preachers of the divine Word who find themselves in the same situation, and they should do nothing different.

He began and spoke: "Now and at our time, people should not drive out devils as it was done at the time of the Apostles and shortly thereafter, when it was necessary to do miracles and signs for the sake of the Gospel, to confirm it as a new doctrine, which now and at our time is not necessary, since the Gospel is not a new doctrine, but has been sufficiently confirmed. And if anyone wants to drive them out as was done at that time, he tempts God," he said.

"One should also not drive out the devils with conjurations, by commanding, like some in the papacy and even some of our own people do, but one should drive them out with prayers and contempt. For the devil is a proud spirit, who cannot stand prayer and despising, but desires a ceremony. Therefore no one should make a ceremony with him, but should despise him as much as possible."

Dr. Luther spoke further, "One should drive out the devil with and through prayer in such a way that one prescribes for the Lord Christ no rule, no means and manner, no time or place when and how he should drive out the devils, for that would be tempting God. But we persist in prayer so long, knock and rap [at the door] so long, until God hears our prayer, as He Himself says, Matth. 7[:7], 'Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.' But Uzziah, he tempts God by setting and prescribing the time for Him, in which He should help him, Judith 7[:30]. Therefore he is rightly rebuked by Judith, Judith 8[:11-27]."

Dr. Luther laid his right hand on the head of the virgin, just like one lays hands on those who are being ordained and consecrated to the preaching office. And he commanded the servants of the Gospel to do the same, and commanded further that they speak after him: First, the Apostles' Creed. Next, the Our Father. Third, Dr. Luther spoke these words, John 16[:23b-24]: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, that will He give to you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." After these words, the blessed doctor called upon God mightily and prayed that He would rescue and save the poor young woman from the evil spirit which was in her for the sake of Christ and of His holy name, that thereby He would be praised, honored, and glorified. After this prayer and admonition, he stepped away from the girl and shoved her with his foot, and mocked Satan, saying, "You proud devil, you would gladly see me set up a ceremony with you, but you will not experience that. I won't do it. Do what you want, I will not give up."

After this procedure, they took the young woman the next day back to Meissen from Wittenberg. And afterwards they wrote and reported several times to Dr. Luther and others that the evil spirit after this no longer tormented and convulsed the girl as previously. (Höcker, in Ludwig Dunte, *Decisiones casuum conscientiae* [1664], pp. 100-103; translated by Benjamin T. G. Mayes)

A certain youth, [apprenticed to] a blacksmith, had been deceived and frightened by nocturnal apparitions and had been led about all the streets from six o'clock to eight o'clock in the evening. Then he was interrogated by the specter as to whether he knew the catechism and was told that he had recently acted in an impious way, that he had received the sacrament in both kinds. Finally he was told, "If you go back to your master's house I'll break your neck." Accordingly he did not enter that house for several days. We took the youth to Doctor [Martin Luther] and gave him an account of the case. Luther then said that one should not be too quick to believe any and everybody, for many fabricate such things; even if he saw a ghost he should not leave his calling. Thereupon Luther questioned the youth about his conversation with Satan and said to him, "See to it that you don't lie. Fear God, hear God's Word, return to your master's house, and do the work of your calling. If Satan comes back, say to him, 'I won't obey you. I'll obey God, who has called me to this work. Even if an angel should come from heaven [and tell me otherwise], I'll remain in my calling.'" (Table Talk #3694 [January 10, 1538], *Luther's Works*, Vol. 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 258)

...in men that are possessed the devil often instigates the movements and actions of their mind, will, and heart; and he himself speaks and does many things through them, for which there is no application of the mind, will, and heart in the possessed. (Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part I [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971], p. 422)

The exorcists they [the papalists] have transformed into magical enchanters. For at one time it was a special gift with the human voice and with divine power to scourge, harass, torture, and cast the devil out of bodies, or at least to control him. Tertullian, in *Apologeticus*, testifies that in his time this gift was still in the church. And Cyprian says, Bk. 4, Letter No. 77: "This is done also today through exorcists." Also Ambrose, Bk. 1, ch. 4: "Another is more concerned to exorcise those who suffer from an evil spirit." That this gift was still present also at the time of Augustine is gathered from *De civitate Dei*, Bk. 10, ch. 22. Indeed, in the age of Chrysostom and Prosper possessed persons were brought into the church and often were set free by the communal prayers of the church.

Afterward, when this gift ceased, in order that the rank of exorcists might nevertheless be retained, another duty was invented which might be assigned to them, namely, to prepare the catechumens, who were to be baptized, with exorcisms and by blowing on them for Baptism, as the book *De Ecclesiasticis dogmatibus*, ch. 51, testifies. And Gregory of Nazianzus says: "Do not be discouraged with the rather long discipline of exorcism, and do not grow weary on account of its length." But such a peculiar action of exorcising was not found in the apostolic church, nor was this the office of the exorcists in the ancient church, and now it is not even observed among the papalists. However, this example shows what a bad imitation accomplishes. When the gift of casting out demons had ceased, and they wanted nevertheless to retain the order of exorcists, a different and new duty was invented which could be assigned to them. Some indeed retained the recitation of exorcisms, although they did not have the gift of casting out demons. From there the bad imitation finally passed over to superstitious exorcisms and to more truly magical incantations. And since the demons scoff at these exorcisms, there is now nothing left with the papalists of the office of exorcists except the bare title, for those who practice exorcisms among them are not the persons who have been especially ordained for this. How then do the Tridentine fathers promise to restore the function of exorcists the way it was in the ancient church, since they do not have and are not able to bestow the

gift of casting out demons? In the ancient church there were prophets or seers, and also evangelists, as Eusebius testifies, Bk. 3, ch. 37. How silly it would be to make particular orders in the church of these offices, although these gifts have ceased! That is also how matters stand with the exorcists. (Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978], pp. 689-90)

## ADDENDUM

The Bible gives us one detailed account of what would today be called a spiritualist seance. It is the story of Saul and the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:1-25). In modern terms the witch would be called a medium.

...

The text clearly indicates that this woman did see something. Moreover, she clearly came into possession of knowledge that she ordinarily could not have. Besides, her predictions were accurately fulfilled. The clear words of the text indicate that her knowledge of secret things came from the spirit with whom she was in contact.

However, a question that has been fruitlessly debated by conservative commentators is whether that spirit was really Samuel or an evil angel pretending to be Samuel. Martin Luther, for example, said that it was an evil spirit that imitated Samuel in appearance and dress. Many Lutheran commentators, following Luther, simply assume that it could not have been Samuel. It should be noted, however, that the arguments presented for that view are often not based on solid biblical grounds. It is said, for example, that God would not permit one of his saints to be summoned back to earth. Nowhere is this taught in the Bible. In fact, it would appear to be contradicted to some extent by the appearance of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration. God sometimes permits things that we might not expect Him to permit.

Others hold that Samuel says that Saul had “disquieted” him, and that this would be an impossible statement for a departed saint in the bliss of eternity. However, the word translated “disquieted” in the AV is not quite that strong. It really only indicates that Saul’s efforts had had some sort of effect on Samuel. Even the translation “disturb,” used in many modern versions, is a little stronger than the Hebrew word, which literally means to “move.”

It is also argued that since Saul evidently died as an unbeliever, it would have been impossible for Samuel to say that Saul and his sons would be with him by the next day, since Samuel was in heaven. But the words of Samuel are naturally understood to mean that Saul and his sons would be in the next world, generally called Sheol by the Jews, where all the dead are.

The arguments against identifying the spirit as the spirit of Samuel are therefore by no means conclusive. There is also not one word in the text to indicate that this was an evil spirit. The spirit is simply called Samuel throughout. Moreover, the language is the language of Samuel (cp. v. 17, 18 with 1 Sam. 15:19, 28). The message given to Saul has the ring of a message from the Lord’s prophet. Besides, it must not be forgotten that all the details of the prophecy were fulfilled. This is always characteristic of a prediction that comes from God, according to Deuteronomy 18:22. If we read the text without preconceived notions of what is possible and not possible the conclusion seems forced upon us that God in His wise government of all things permitted the spirit of Samuel to be brought into contact with Saul by this wicked woman. (Siegbert W. Becker, *Wizards That Peep: A Journey Into the Occult*, Second Edition [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2010], pp. 56-58)



A Reformation-Era Exorcism (1598 woodcut)



Martin Luther throwing an inkwell at the devil, at Wartburg Castle