

Jesus the Healer

Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer* (New York: The Continuum Pub. Co., 1995),

Instances of demon-possession are to be found much more commonly among classes and kinds of persons who are otherwise unable aggressively to respond to oppression and insult. Demon-possession is more often than not a coping mechanism, attempt to solve problems resulting from unsatisfactory personal relationships by those whose social status is so subordinate that they have no other effective recourse. 37

Davies further describes what I.M. Lewis observed,

Possession plays a significant part in the enhancement of status. One result of possession by those spirits which we have classified as 'peripheral' is to enable people who lack other means of protection and self-promotion to advance their interests and improve their lot by escaping, if only temporarily, from the confining bonds of their allotted stations in society. 38.

According to Davies except in case where clear psychopathology exists, and they are comparatively rare, individuals who experience possessions do so (consciously or unconsciously) for their own benefit and for the benefit of their local social groups. Possession is not, per se, a pathological disorder. 38.

The case of Genesaret demonic will fit this description. Some scholars interpret the text:

Because possessed persons enjoy an upward alteration in social status during the period of their possession, more of the people of relatively low social status, marginal people, people in a condition of social oppression, choose to join possession-oriented groups. 39.

According to Davies, faith in the power of the healer and the healer's self-presentation is the key factor involved, as it is a key factor in the clinical practice of modern medicines. He claims that cases alleviated or cured by faith healing are usually, but not invariably, psychosomatic in nature. To use more precise terminology than 'psychosomatic,' faith healers can be expected to cure problems produced by 'conversion disorders.' Conversion disorders can occur when an individual because of actions for which he feels guilt, refuses to accept the guilt, and interiorizes it. That interiorized guilt is then manifested by self-punishment such as blindness, or paralysis, or dermatitis. It is assumed in psychoanalytic theory that the manner of the displayed conversion disorder will correlate in some way with the nature of the event that gave rise to the guilt in the first place. Conversion disorder is technically defined as follows:

The essential feature of this disorder is an alteration or loss of physical functioning that suggests physical disorder, but that instead is apparently an expression of psychological conflict or need. 70.

As Davies noted, in Jesus days people understood sickness was the result of individual sin or God's punishment of the sin of individuals. The resolution of a problem understood to be the result of sin would be alleviated on the occasion of the forgiveness of sins by God. The problems that were thought to arise from the presence of demons would be resolved when the demons were overpowered by a more powerful supernatural force, the power of God. In healing activity, priests or scribes and Pharisees acted on *behalf* of God

but Jesus acted *as* God. As Mark's account says 'a son of man who forgive sins act *as* God. Therefore, elimination of sin is, formal permission to forgive oneself. When forgiveness is granted by God or, in this case, Jesus presenting himself as the spirit of God, then what happens is that an individual has 'divine' permission to forgive himself or herself. So forgiveness happens and, with it, the conversion symptomatology that guilt or trauma brought about fades away. Psychological factors would lead to the elimination of the presenting symptoms. Davies notes this is how 'supernatural events' can be understood to be historical events.⁷⁵

Davies notes faith in a healer who promises forgiveness and access to the power of God can immediately alleviate anxiety, stress, guilt and so permit the full functioning of the somatic immune system that may, in turn, eliminate diseases of viral, bacterial, etc., origins. The primitive technique he used such as touching, spitting, and mud application and recommended that individual bathe in the supposedly medicinally effective pools. Davies claims that the latter results in placebo effect. This means anything can be done if we have faith in it. ⁷⁷.

The cause of demonic possession is said to be Roman domination of Galilee and the resulting extraordinary excessive taxation and indebtedness of Galileans; the act of exorcism is assumed to be a political act with anti-Roman overtones. Davies calls the Gerasene demonic is an anti-Roman allegory as it stands in Mar. *It is an imaginative allegory, not a historical reminiscence.*

Jesus' Therapeutic Speech – 'blessed are those who weep', 'blessed are those who are hungry', 'your faith made you well', etc. had an effect of placing the disturbed individual in charge of his or her own situation of stress. He reframed the problems into positive thinking of themselves.

Davies and Borg would consider Jesus as a 'spirited person' or 'possessed person by the spirit of God. Davies suggests that 'Christ' is the Greek translation of the Hebrew 'Messiah.' These terms mean, of course, 'the anointed one.' If Jesus believed himself to be one who was anointed, and so to have had a special role to which he was appointed by God, it is anything but unlikely that the anointing in question was his initial possession experience, his prophetic anointing by the Spirit. The First Letter of John testifies to the fact that the equation of 'anointing' with 'spirit reception' is *not* an idiosyncratic idea of Luke's. If Jesus labeled the Spirit 'the Son,' then he was both the Son of God (in the sense of possession by the spirit-Son) and the Christ (in the sense of possession as anointing). ¹⁴⁸.