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THE DEVIL GOES MISSING?

DELIVERANCE:
THEOLOGY, PRACTICE, HISTORY

John Woolmer

MONARCH
BOOKS

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DEDICATION

For Tony Collins who long ago asked me to write this book and who, subsequently, for many years guided my writing. His friendship and trust have made a great difference to my wider ministry over the last twenty years.

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INTRODUCTION

*Tread all the powers of darkness down,
and win the well-fought day.*

(“Soldiers of Christ, Arise”, Charles Wesley)

In January 2014, there was some theological controversy because a new baptism service, proposed by a senior cleric in the Church of England, omitted any reference to the devil. Now knowing who the author is, I understand that his motives were pastoral rather than theological – an attempt to simplify the service and make it more easily understood. *The Times* ran an article entitled “The Devil Goes Missing”. The *Ten o’clock News* programme on Radio 4 had a limp discussion between two sceptical clerics on the subject. Somewhat infuriated and disturbed, late that evening I penned the following letter to *The Times*:

The devil doesn’t go missing

Sir,

I write as an Anglican clergyman, with a degree in Mathematics, who has had some forty years’ ministry. In this time, it is been my privilege to visit many houses where parishioners, and others, were deeply disturbed by inexplicable frightening phenomena. I have also prayed with a number of people who, usually through dabbling in some sort of occult practice, were troubled by some spiritual presence. I have exercised this ministry in sophisticated Oxford, rural Somerset, working-class Leicester, and many parts of East Africa, Papua New Guinea, Argentina. In every situation,

the phenomena have been similar and are most easily explained by taking the opening chapters of Mark's Gospel seriously. Twice, powerful physical forces have left a person or a building, in each case knocking backwards my helper. Once, in rural Zambia, my wife and I were addressed in perfect Oxbridge English by a spirit saying, "Go away, I am not leaving this person!" No English person had visited that village for many years and no one spoke English except the priest. As a mathematician, Bayes' theorem on conditional probability strongly supports the view that this phenomena occurred because it is similar to the Gospel accounts.

I have exercised this ministry in pubs, a factory, offices and many houses. For the most part, the ministry to buildings and people is very quiet and straightforward. One of those that I have been privileged to help is now an ordained minister in the Anglican Church.

Obviously, there is a huge danger of exaggerating the need for this ministry. Over-enthusiastic exorcists can do more harm than the most sceptical liberal cleric. Actual possession, or better, indwelling by evil spirits, is very rare; being troubled by negative spiritual powers, in my experience, is quite common. People are enormously grateful when their troubles are taken seriously and even more grateful when the spiritual forces disappear – which, if the diagnosis is correct, they invariably do when told firmly and politely to leave "in the name of Jesus". Prebendary John Woolmer (retired)

PS It would be very nice to have a letter published on my primary calling rather than on the noble subject of Purple Emperors!

The result was unexpected. The letters deputy editor emailed me to say that the letter was too long to publish but was of such interest that they would like to send their religious correspondent to interview me. Not long afterwards, the very courteous Ruth Gledhill travelled up to Leicester and had lunch with me and my wife, Jane. She then interviewed me for over an hour. Although most of our conversation was probably outside her experience, she remained very interested and asked plenty of searching questions. She then wrote a very positive piece which was published a few weeks later, taking up most of a page on a Saturday edition of *The Times*.¹

The first purpose of this short book is to argue that the existence of

the devil is a necessary part of our theological understanding of God. Furthermore, there are many people in this country and overseas who need help to be released from oppressive spiritual problems.

Secondly, only if the church proclaims a clear and unashamed message will people seek help from her – otherwise people may seek help from alternative sources, which are normally expensive and dangerous. We have a pastoral duty to offer help.

Thirdly, when people do see release for themselves or their homes, they will recognize the true power of the risen Christ. Possibly, readers of these stories may think that the people have received help which is primarily psychological. However, it is difficult to see the dramatic change in the atmosphere in houses, pubs, offices, and factories as psychological – it is safer and simpler, in each case, to attribute any change to the power and the presence of the risen Lord.

It seems highly significant to me that the distinguished American historian, Ramsay MacMullen, writing about the conversion of the Roman Empire,² rates exorcism as one of the most significant factors which bring about individual conversions – certainly in the period pre-Constantine's conversion before AD 312. He has little time for recent historians who attribute these conversions to what he calls crowd psychology. He prefers, rightly I think, to give weight to the considerable evidence of the early church fathers.

If this thesis is correct, then this timeless, cross-cultural ministry deserves to be taken very seriously. That is the case which I hope to present. People sometimes object to my teaching about the supernatural (both on angels and demons) by saying something to the effect of, "I've never experienced anything like this so why is it important?"

From my house, I can walk up to Bradgate Park (home of Lady Jane Grey, the unfortunate nine-day queen who was executed in the Tower of London in 1554 aged sixteen) and across the road to Swithland Wood.

In the park, I occasionally see adders. Sometimes they are basking in the sun. In the spring they may be mating on a grassy bank beneath a stone wall in which they have hibernated. In the autumn they may be on the move, looking for a safe place to overwinter. Despite having some idea where to look, I will probably see an adder just once or twice in a year. They are certainly very numerous. Yet many people walk in the park without ever seeing a snake. Many dogs trample

through the grass and bracken; very few, if any, are bitten in a given year. The snakes prefer to remain out of the way and out of sight.

Across the road in Swithland Wood, there is a large colony of Purple Hairstreak butterflies. They spend most of their active life high up in the canopy of the oaks. Occasionally they descend to bask on sunlit warm foliage, especially the females. The females also descend to release some of their eggs on low-lying oak saplings. Because I know where to look, I can usually spot the butterflies during their flight season; I can often find their tiny white eggs in the forks of suitable oak twigs. I can sometimes find their caterpillars, which usually haven't strayed far from the empty eggshells. Many people walk in the woods. But few are aware of, or see, the butterfly. Virtually none, I would hazard, see either the eggs or a caterpillar, although they often walk within a foot of where the eggs have been laid and where the caterpillars are sitting, well camouflaged, on the oak buds. Even I, with years of knowledge, have never found a chrysalis.

From these natural observations, I would make the following points. The supernatural world is all around us. But just as I can scarcely sing a note in tune, so many Christians remain blind to anything but the natural world. Angels, I believe, are present. But, like the Purple Hairstreak butterfly, angels are seldom seen. Evil spirits, like adders, prefer to remain hidden. They may be present but are seldom noticed. If their malign effect is observed, usually other explanations will be proffered. As C. S. Lewis writes in one of his most famous books:³

My dear Wormwood,

I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient in ignorance of your own existence. That question, has been answered for us by the High Command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course this has not always been so. We are faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and sceptics.

We need to take note of all this and then we will be far better equipped to help our suffering world.

CHAPTER 1

A ZAMBIAN ADVENTURE

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him.

(Psalm 34:7)

On the evening of Monday 11 May 1992, my wife Jane and I, together with a faithful band of helpers, arrived at the small village of Mutwe Wa Nkoko, deep in the bush in the Luapula province in Northern Zambia. It had been a long, dusty and uncomfortable drive. We were given a rapturous, typically Zambian, and utterly unforgettable welcome.

I was leading a SOMA (Sharing of Ministries Abroad) team. We were accompanied by the late Martin Cavender, then director of Springboard, Archbishop Carey's flagship project for evangelism. His son Henry, a student at Kingston University, had come to make a film of our mission. We were accompanied by Archdeacon Tobias Kaoma, Agnes Mupeta who lived in nearby Mansa and was the leader of the important diocesan Mothers' Union, and Martha Zulu who was the administrator and evangelist for Bishop Bernard Malango.

En route, we paid a courtesy call to the local chief. His household was in chaos, with sickness and considerable anxiety concerning a daughter who was about to give birth. We prayed for them all and gave some small gifts of food. About a mile from the village we were met by hundreds of dancing, smiling people. They had garlands of flowers to give us and greeted us, dancing as they sang, "Sangale

sangale" (let's be joyful). In the midst of a life-threatening drought, this was pretty impressive. We left our vehicle and joined in the fun. Clearly foreign visitors were unusual.

The village seemed quite small: a little church, a good deep well, a few houses (shambas) and, in the distance, a school whose roof had been blown off in a storm some eighteen months earlier.

Under the light of the brilliant African sky and the Southern Cross, we washed as discreetly as possible in steaming hot water, protected by a little stockade. Then there was a camp fire, which involved food, singing, drama, and much laughter. The main drama was about a man who tried to steal from his neighbour, but first he had to steal a bone from someone else to silence the neighbour's dog! There was another about stealing a man's wife – which felt distinctly close to the bone.

We went to bed happily and looking forward to two useful days of speaking, praying, and discovering the extent and effect of the drought. This was my second visit to Zambia. The first, two years earlier, had taken me to the old mission centre at Chipili. Mutwe was about four hours' drive from Chipili. I think, because of the circuitous nature of the roads, we could have walked there in about the same time.

Chipili in 1990 had opened my eyes and renewed my faith. Peter Hancock, then the healing advisor for Bath and Wells, and I spent four days addressing a conference of about 2,000 people who were camping in the grounds around the old mission station. We heard a churchwarden give out a notice: "Tomorrow, brother and sisters, you are going to see signs and wonders – not performed by these men, but by Almighty God." And that is what happened. We had four prayer teams. On two successive days we prayed for several hours. Many collapsed to the ground – shrieking as demons left them. Many professed faith or renewed their baptismal vows. There were healings – Peter saw two people with a blind eye healed.

On the Sunday, after a two-hour service and well over 1,000 communicants, we prayed for four hours. I was awaiting a hip replacement, but somehow was able to stand for that length of time with little pain. At the end, Jason Mfula, a local leader who had been Zambian High Commissioner in Australia, said, "You have brought us the water of the Holy Spirit – now the challenge is, do

something about the village water supply.” I did my best and raised about £2,000 to replace a worn-out pump, which was used to bring water from the river (where thirty years ago the UMCA missionaries had shot the last crocodile) up to the houses and schools situated far above it.

The next morning in Mutwe, a crowd of about 500 gathered. We held a joyful service in the open air. After much singing and dancing, led by the exuberant members of the Mothers’ Union (clad in smart white turbans and blue chitengas – the brightly coloured, full-length skirts worn by all the women), I preached about drawing water from “the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). It seemed appropriate in a village whose deep, cool well was sustaining them in a time of drought.

It was all very quiet and good natured. Blue Charaxes butterflies danced from one great tree to another, providing me with a pleasant distraction. At the end of the morning, we invited people to join us for a time of prayer in the nearby church.

I was used to spiritual drama in Luapula, but nothing had prepared me for the ferocious battle that erupted. Tobias Kaoma, experienced in prayer and exorcism, was surrounded by a group of screaming women. The rest of us found that we only had to utter a word of prayer, or stretch out our hands in prayer towards someone, and they started to flutter their eyelids, shake violently, collapse to the ground, or even start slithering across the floor in a passable imitation of the local snake. Henry, the youngest member of the team, who had come as a late addition to make a video, made an understandably swift exit. He was terrified!

In the midst of this maelstrom, Jane, my wife, called me over and said, “Listen to this.” One of the woman, or to be more accurate the spirit that was speaking through her, said, “Go away. I am not leaving this person!” She was speaking in perfect Oxbridge English – Zambians normally speak English with a lilting, soft accent, but this woman’s voice was harsh and powerful – a good mimic of mine. We made little progress and retired for a simple lunch, somewhat bruised and chastened. It was one of the few occasions that prayers of deliverance didn’t seem to have much effect.

After a quick visit to a maize field, where I was shown the devastating effect of the drought on their crops, I returned to speak to the gathering crowd. Something was stirring within me.

Speaking against the local demons

It was not my normal style, but I felt convinced that we had to stand against the local principalities and powers – especially Masonda, the black snake spirit, and Malenga, the water spirit. Both these names came up frequently when we asked people what was troubling them. The black snake was probably the emblem of local witchcraft. It seemed likely that many of the local mothers sought protection from the medicine men while also bringing their babies to the church for baptism.

Before speaking, I made a public prayer against these two demonic powers – fallen angels in biblical terms. I then challenged the congregation to stop hesitating between two opinions; to choose Christ and to throw away all charms, fetishes, and potions from the local witchdoctors. The response was laughter – not the friendly, good-natured laughter of the morning – but hollow, sinister, mocking laughter.

I asked my great friend Archdeacon Tobias, who was a wonderfully enthusiastic interpreter, what was happening. He said, “They are saying – we have so little and now you are telling us to throw things away.” For a split second, I could sense their devastating logic. What right had I, a rich Westerner on only my second visit to Zambia, to challenge their culture and to tell them to throw away some of their most precious possessions?

The anger of God

Suddenly I was overwhelmed. For almost the only time in my life, I felt what I can only describe as the anger of God. The fact that I was an ignorant, visiting Westerner didn’t seem important – what mattered was that God was honoured, and that meant that the Demonic Powers had to be opposed. People had to make a choice. No longer could they oscillate between two opinions. Even now, years later, I find it quite awesome to write about that afternoon. I spoke – I have no idea what – firm, even harsh words. I have never spoken like that before or since.

When I had finished, I felt shattered. I felt that I had failed, going way over the top. I don’t remember much about the rest of the day.

We had a session planned with Father James Chungolo, the local priest, and his healing team. I was so exhausted that I left Martin Cavender to speak to them, while Jane had a good session with the local Mothers' Union, who are a tower of strength both spiritually and socially in rural Zambia. There are two women's groups in the Zambian church – the Mothers' Union who provide leadership and stability and the Veronicas who provide social assistance, especially to young mothers.

After another hard night on a mattress on the floor, with bats above, mosquitoes all around, spiders on the floor, and the possibility of snakes coming in from outside, I felt distinctly unenthusiastic about the dawning of Wednesday morning. At least our prayer group back in Shepton Mallet would have been praying for us during the previous evening.

The angel around the church

The next morning we began with a communion service in the little church. About 300 people were crammed inside. I tried to ignore a substantial wasp busying itself with building a nest behind the altar, close to where we were sitting. I was aware that I had nothing to say (an unusual occurrence as Jane would agree). I was grateful for the quiet rhythm of the Anglican Liturgy.

Eventually, it was time to preach. I even contemplated a little joke (Mfumu was the Bemba word for God; Mfubu was the word for a hippo!). I could still think of nothing to say. In desperation (or inspiration?), I asked Tobias Kaoma to give his testimony. Tobias was about sixty; his beloved wife, Prisca, had died only a month earlier at the age of forty-nine. Despite his very evident grief, Tobias had left his parish in Chipili to accompany us and to act as our leader, chief exorcist, and my translator.

Tobias' eyes lit up as he testified to his conversion, his calling to the priesthood (when working as a head teacher), and about the day two years earlier when he had been spontaneously, and unexpectedly, deeply touched by the Holy Spirit.

I well remember that afternoon. A good friend of mine was speaking about the Holy Spirit. I, I am embarrassed to say, was falling asleep, only to be awakened by the sight and sound of Tobias

leaping around and praising God in many different languages. I am ashamed to admit that my first unworthy thought was, "Here is a drunk Zambian priest." But Tobias was transformed that afternoon. He was drunk – in the sense of Acts 2:15–21. The Holy Spirit filled him (Ephesians 5:18) in a most remarkable way. A quiet, unassuming, retired headmaster became a really powerful minister of the gospel. On another visit, the discerning Peter Hancock described him as the most powerful confronter of demons that he had ever met. Outwardly, he remained quiet, unassuming, and gracious. Inwardly, he was filled with power. His demeanour and character were those of one of the most Christlike people that I have met.

Tobias' testimony was lifting everyone's spirits but, while he was still speaking, a tall, dark lady glided out of the congregation. "Could I say something?" she asked. For a woman not even belonging to the Mothers' Union to interrupt a visiting leader was culturally unheard of, but Tobias graciously and characteristically gave way.

The lady continued to glide slowly forward. Her face shone. Only once have I seen that sort of light on someone's face.¹

Her story was simple; its effect dramatic. As she spoke, her face continued to shine with what seemed to be a supernatural light. She spoke in Bemba, the local language. Early that morning, she and some friends had walked in the half-light from her village to the church. She and one of her companions had noticed a figure dressed in white following slowly along the path. While she peeled off into the bushes beside the church, the figure went round the other side. She and her companion then walked around the church expecting to see the person dressed in white. There was no one to be seen. The ground around the church is quite open, with a few trees and some shambas (Zambian huts).

The crowded congregation was deeply moved. Zambians do not wear white clothes. The Mothers' Union welcomed the lady, and symbolically placed one of their turbans on her head. Everyone felt that she had seen an angel, who had been sent to cleanse the church from the battles of the previous day. It was, and remains to this day, the most obviously supernatural experience of my life.

The contrast with the futile battles of the previous day was remarkable; the whole atmosphere in the church was quite different. There was a sort of spiritual electricity in the air. It felt a little like the

occasion in the Gospels where Luke writes, “The power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal those who were ill” (Luke 5:17). No one can conjure up these times; they are a sovereign gift from God!

I preached a simple evangelistic sermon. I asked those who would like to respond to stand up and come forward. Two young men stood, and then the floodgates opened. We prayed for about forty; then for another sixty, including the local headman. During all this time of prayer, only one demon showed up. The man concerned was taken outside (always wisest to take people away from the limelight – demons are exhibitionists and seem to gain strength when lots of people are around), and evil powers were banished quickly and silently! Then we continued in prayer for the leaders and for many others to be healed, released from any evil oppression, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Lunchtime came. The Blue Charaxes butterflies² were courting around the tree nearest to the church, but it was time to leave. We left with much sadness, but also with great joy and a feeling of “mission accomplished”.

We paid a return visit to the local chief. This time there was great joy here too. Two hours earlier, his granddaughter had been safely born, the mother was well, and other members of the household were better. We prayed and gave thanks for the little girl and retreated with an honoured gift – a live chicken, which entertained us during the long, dusty car journey by pecking at Martin’s trousers.

Soon afterwards, somewhat fired up by these experiences, we had a remarkable day in Mansa, the nearby provincial capital. A young woman brought from the hospital was lying in a side room in the church. She had been in hospital a month and had not walked for over a year. I saw her and mentally hoped that I would not be the one to pray for her. While I was preaching, Martin and Martha Zulu counselled her and prayed for her. They described her as like a “flower unfolding”. She walked out of the side room, down the aisle of the crowded church, and went to discharge herself from the local hospital while her astonished father opened his heart to the Lord.

A more sophisticated man, Douglas Mupeta, husband of Agnes, the Mothers’ Union leader in the area, asked for prayer for his stiff neck and arthritic knees. Nothing happened. Martin took him aside and counselled him, lawyer to lawyer. Something was released. Two

hours later, he was running down the road to catch up with us as we went to lunch.

Later on that visit, we had some memorable ministry in a village near Mansa. An old lady who had walked in with a white stick, apparently almost totally blind, said to Jane after prayer, "What a nice white shirt you are wearing, my dear!"

Mutwe's reputation confirmed

Two years later, part of a team that I was leading revisited Mutwe. They found it tough going, but the lady who had seen the angel was a very visible part of the church, and Father James was providing dynamic leadership. Yet clearly, our visit had only dented the powers of darkness around the village.

In another part of Zambia, I talked to a remarkable priest who, at the age of eighty-two in a mining town on the copper-belt, was still physically building new churches and evangelizing new areas. He was very tall and very dignified. Over lunch, I mentioned Mutwe. He looked very serious and said quietly, "I visited Mutwe about twenty years ago. It is the darkest place that I have ever been to." He added that he'd had some terrible battles with demons there. I found his evidence strangely reassuring.

Clearly Mutwe is a place that has lived up to its name (which literally means "The Village of the Severed Chicken's Head"). Gradually, as the Christian gospel takes a deeper root there, the powers of darkness will be driven back.

Spiritual outcomes – Henry Cavender and James Chungolo

Martin's son Henry had come to Zambia as a late addition to our team. A priest had dropped out at very short notice so Martin suggested that Henry came, mainly to make a film of the trip. Henry, not yet a Christian, was both intrigued and scared by what he was required to film. It wasn't difficult to film his father giving radio and TV interviews, even if it was surprising to see the church taken so seriously by the national media. It wasn't hard to shoot the exuberant Zambian worship, so refreshingly different to what he was used to

at home. It was rather harder to watch people being prayed for– and apparently benefiting from the experience. It seemed both intrusive and frightening to film people who seemed troubled by malevolent spirits. These people were mainly young women, often with babies on their backs.

When Henry returned to England, he spent his gap year living in Bath, and frequently found his friends asking him about things he had seen in Africa. When he reported what he had seen and heard the usual reaction was, “You must be joking.” For eight years Henry remained on a spiritual knife-edge – believing and yet not quite committed.

Through university life and then on into the corporate world of London, he knew there would come a point when he would have to make a decision. That point came when, at a junction in London, Henry reached again for a Bible and was drawn to the book of Ecclesiastes. The author, Solomon, spoke deeply to Henry’s heart and he knew this was it. Rather beautifully, and through an unrelated set of circumstances, Henry’s long-term girlfriend, Emma, then living in Bath, also came to faith and made a commitment to follow Jesus. Within months they married and started attending an Assemblies of God church, signing up to get baptized as a symbol of their new beginning.

The baptism was due on a Sunday, but by the Thursday, Henry was having second thoughts: “Is it really necessary to do this? God knows my heart. I’ve already made a commitment.”

That night he dreamed that he and Emma were walking along a sand-blown road on a hot tropical island. They walked through a bustling market and on towards the beach. The day was beautiful and the beach was just ahead, so they ignored the big hotel where they were supposed to check in, and carried on excitedly with all their luggage. When they arrived on the beach, it was brilliant – clean sand, blue sky, and glorious sea, and they lay underneath a palm shelter with some friends. Then the mood changed. Menacing waves reared up and patrolled left and right. They heard thunder, the sky turned black, strong winds blew sand across the beach and, from the dark sky above, bolts of fire began to rain down as people ran screaming for shelter. As they grabbed their bags and raced for the cover of the big hotel, Henry felt a lump of brimstone hit his leg and woke up with a fright. He knew for certain he must check in on Sunday.

His mother arrived for the service. She was a little late, having driven 200 miles. Henry was just about to be immersed and was explaining to the congregation that he had seen it all in Zambia, but had delayed making a real profession of faith until now. In his testimony, he described himself as “Hesitant Henry”.

Soon afterwards, Henry became involved in full-time ministry – notably leading a church for surfers in Polzeath in Cornwall. He now works part-time for the Methodist Church as a pioneer minister in the area.

James Chungolo was greatly inspired and twice came to help me minister in other parts of Luapula Province. On one occasion in 1999, he cycled fifty kilometres to Mwenda with a flat tyre to help us. At least three remarkable things happened.

On the Sunday, we were to hold an open air service in a large area surrounded by a fence, where they were starting to build a church. As we were about to begin, a woman came up to me. She said, “I must tell you about my daughter who has just died.” I sighed inwardly and wondered how I could comfort her and answer the inevitable question: “Why did God let it happen?” She continued, “Five years ago you came to our village. You prayed for my daughter who was lying paralysed on her bed.”

Suddenly I remembered my third visit to Zambia in 1994. We had left Chipili to visit a small village. After a service, I was asked to go and pray for a teenager lying helpless in a shamba. I felt tired after preaching and praying for many people. I asked Albert Owen, a reader from my parish in Shepton Mallet, to accompany me, and left the rest of the team to encourage the local leaders. We were led into a very dark room. We could just see someone lying on a bed; we couldn’t really tell how ill she was. We anointed her with oil. To be honest, I didn’t have much faith but, to our surprise, the teenager got up off the bed – apparently completely well.

The mother had walked about fifty kilometres to be with us. She said quite simply, “I want to give thanks to God for the five good years that she had. She died of malaria.” I wanted to say, “God, if you healed her of the paralysis, why did you let her die of malaria?” The mother, with a much more balanced faith, had just come to give thanks. I was deeply moved. It was one of the most profound testimonies I have ever received.

I thought of the long journey. I remembered the hazardous drive along the Pedicle – the Zambian road which runs through the edge of the Democratic Republic of Congo. And I silently gave thanks to God that he had allowed me to come and see such amazing things.

A few minutes later the service was in full swing. Halfway through, we started to pray for people. After a short time, I heard a commotion in a distant corner of the area. I went over to try and help. Father James was struggling with a young woman. He said she was demonized and speaking in French. We had discovered that the demons were exhibitionists. They seemed to gain strength from crowds of onlookers. We moved her outside the fenced area. She was gently placed in a small pit where clay for making bricks had been extracted. At my instigation, we marched round seven times singing, “In the name of Jesus, demons will have to flee.” They did. When we had finished, the young woman was smiling and completely free. No further prayers were necessary.

At the end of the service, we were aware of a young man who couldn’t stop grunting. No amount of prayer or command seemed to have any effect. That evening, Martin Cavender, Father James and I listened to his story. He had been brought up in Lusaka. When he was quite young, his parents were murdered. He was moved to stay with some relatives in Chipili. He said they practised witchcraft. He couldn’t stop grunting especially during worship. Father James said that the young man had been invaded by a pig spirit. I was very dubious about the diagnosis, but James’ prayers seemed effective.

The next day the young man was very happy when his grunting was silenced, with one brief command. He walked back with me to the village in a very relaxed state. It was wonderful to see the transformation. The deliverance ministry, rightly exercised, brings extraordinary freedom and benefit.

When I returned to England, I read the Greek text of Paul in Philippi. The Greek, “πνεῦμα πύθωνα” (Acts 16:16), said that the slave girl who could foretell the future literally had the spirit of a python (translated as spirit of divination or fortune-telling in our Bibles). Evidently I had been wrong to doubt James’ diagnosis. If the woman in Philippi could have a python spirit, a young man in Mwenda could certainly have a pig spirit!³

Concluding thoughts

When in Southwell Minster in about 2005, I was helping to lead a training day for the diocese on the subject of healing and deliverance. After lunch, there was a question and answer session. It was here that an elderly clergyman stood up and said, "Isn't it time we stopped conniving with this medieval mumbo-jumbo?" I whispered to the Christian psychiatrist sitting next to me, "I think more of your profession believe in the reality of evil powers than mine." She nodded. The bishop said, "John, what have you to say to this?"

I related very briefly the story of the lady speaking in Oxbridge English in Mutwe. I said quietly, something to effect of, "I think by far the most likely explanation is that we were witnessing something similar to that recorded in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel. It is the only explanation which makes any sense." There seemed to be a ripple of relieved assent from most of the assembled clergy. Once again, the events of May 1992 in a very rural Zambian village were having a profound spiritual effect.

One final question – why did the village of Mutwe have such spiritual problems? I can only presume that at one level the village must have had exceptionally powerful witchdoctors. Matthew Parris⁴ might agree with that! Mentioning them in my afternoon talk provoked the only really hostile reaction that I have been aware of during many years of such ministry in many different countries. That suggests a climate of fear. I find the evidence of the eighty-two-year-old Zambian priest very persuasive. If that godly man thought Mutwe was the darkest place he had visited, then that is strong evidence.

At a deeper level, we might be witnessing the power of territorial spirits. We shall consider that in a later chapter. Praying against the water spirit and the snake spirit certainly provoked a reaction. But I don't want to press the case too far. I am well content to let the glowing face of the woman who had apparently seen the angel, and a well-spoken evil spirit make the case – in Mutwe, the devil had certainly not gone missing!