

Exorcism is a topical subject, and this somewhat journalistic book is, in its way, a calm and objective study of the phenomenon, past and present. The author concludes that there is something in it, at least. Very rightly, he indicates that the New Testament presents exorcism as a major characteristic of the work of Christ, that cannot simply be interpreted away. He reminds us, though, that this is not seen as a confrontation between "superstition and ritual", but as the victory of good over evil by the sheer presence and intrinsic authority of Christ. Baker goes on to suggest that progressively "devils" came to be a rather facile way of objectifying (whether to persecute or to practise) whatever the Church happened to disapprove of—especially sex. Obviously there is some truth in this, and one is indeed struck by the rather simplistic puritanism of most modern writers on exorcism. But it is very unfair to christian history to suggest that there is nothing much more than this to be said. By comparison with the naive and jejune demonology of

most moderns, the sophistication, both pastoral and metaphysical, of, say, St Athanasius, or even the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, is most impressive. Contrary to the impression given by Baker, classical christian demonology does not regard the demonic as an alternative explanation of various phenomena; it is, for instance, well aware of the interplay between the demonic and the pathological. Nor does it regard the demonic as normally absolving the human subject of all responsibility—in the *Testamentum Domini*, for example, it is ruled that a catechumen who still shows signs of demonic influence at Easter is to be taken away and given a severe talking to by the deacon! If we are to reach a sane and balanced intellectual and practical approach to this important subject, we could do a lot worse than begin by going to school to the ancient theologians.

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