

EDITORIAL:

A FEW GOOD PERSONS: TOWARD A DIALOG ON POSSESSION AND EXORCISM

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This issue of *DISSOCIATION* is dedicated to the exploration of the phenomenon of possession. When I was approached about the possibility of doing a special issue on possession, I confess to having suffered severe misgivings. I admired Dr. Begelman's sincere and sustained scholarly efforts to study and communicate about possession, not only as a clinical entity, but as a sociocultural phenomenon, and as a theological concern. Nonetheless, I was aware that many clinicians and scientific investigators in our field hold strong and divergent opinions about many aspects of possession, and knew that data do not exist to resolve those disagreements at this point in time. I also was aware that any issue on this subject would invariably include many ideas, attitudes, and frames of reference that I do not embrace. In fact, I was amused to reflect that although I have commented on both clinical, cultural, and anthropological aspects of possession and the difficulties encountered in finding the appropriate diagnostic classification for its many manifestations, my published remarks on the subject are not cited by a single author who contributed to this issue. They cannot be accused of playing to the editor!

Nonetheless, despite my concerns and some dire predictions from some of those who became aware of this project, I have encouraged it, and declined to press its participants to resolve their differences except by encouraging a format that supported an ongoing dialogue among them. As a result, this issue reads more like the proceedings of a symposium and the transcription of the interplay of its participants than a standard issue. We can see their disagreements firmly stated, and observe their efforts to bridge, mollify, and/or respect those disagreements. It has a liveliness that I think the reader will find refreshing, especially when the commentators swing into action and the authors make their spirited replies. The parry and riposte of their arguments and counter-arguments are often invigorating.

We are indebted to Dr. Begelman and his colleagues for their efforts to explore many aspects of possession, and for their not hesitating to raise issues that are troubling, perplexing, provocative, and likely to remain unresolved for the foreseeable future. I share Dr. Begelman's regret that a respected contributor who would have represented the viewpoint of the "healing ministry" withdrew from participation at an advanced stage of preparation. This unfortunate type of mishap or literary exodus is the worst nightmare of the editor assembling an issue that deals with multiple perspectives on a complex problem, because it is almost invariably beyond the editor's control, and virtually impossible to address within the

framework of an agreed-upon production schedule.

Drs. Begelman, Bowman, Coons, Fraser, and their discussants, Drs. Crabtree, Noll and Rosik, have made excellent contributions toward the initiation of a substantive dialog on the subjects of possession and exorcism. Their efforts have been enriched by the comments of the anonymous reviewers who offered feedback on the first drafts of the original articles. We are all the beneficiaries of their efforts, and will be the beneficiaries of the efforts of those who will be stimulated by these contributions from "a few good persons" to add their own as yet unwritten and unpublished communications to our knowledge in the future.

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