

**Shamanhood and Mythology
Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy and Current
Techniques of Research**

In Honour of Mihály Hoppál, celebrating his 75th Birthday

Edited by Attila Mátéffy and György Szabados

With the assistance of Tamás Csernyei

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“Divine and demonic possession”? Farewell to a failed concept

Since the publication of Erika Bourguignon’s book (Bourguignon 1976) which today is regarded as a classic of the subject (See Boddy 1994; Cohen 2008), a whole library of publications of different disciplines and in different approaches have been dealing with the phenomena of “possession”. By this time *“there are so much different states designed by the expression of ‘possession’ – both in the history of religions and in the science of religion and in the neighbouring research fields – that it has become practically impossible to define what really the possession is”* (Zinser 1990: 131). This grave statement can be read in one of the excellent German textbook of the science of religion, in the related vocabulary entry.

The nature of the “possession” is summed by Éva Pócs, after Vincent Crapanzano (Crapanzano 1987), in the following way: *“Theoretically it has close ties to the psycho-biological state of trance or – to use a term fashionable in ethno-psychiatry – to some forms of altered states of consciousness (ASC). In this perspective trance is a precondition or „psycho/biological condition” of the coming about of the experience of possession ... According to the narrower definitions, possession is an altered state of consciousness, which is accompanied by an experience or explanation according to which the individual can come under the influence of an alien spirit or entity”* (Pócs 2005: 84). She regards “possession” according to her extended definition, when the alien spirit, entity „just is about the subject, attack him/her from the outside” (Pócs 2007: 358–359): *“the other possibility is that the spirit does not enter the body of the possessed person, rather it is only near the individual, controlling, attacking the person from outside, this is what is called **circumpossessio** or ... **essence possession** in the English terminology, or **general possession**”* (Pócs 2005: 84–85).

I believe that the second one can be challenged on methodological grounds, being not properly established scientifically. Furthermore, this extended definition conceives “possession” not only as the proper, full or temporary possession, called by the Church by Latin terminology as “possession” or “obsession”, but also includes in the definition the milder states of harassment by an alien spirit. This is a too flexible and rather arbitrary definition. It is as absurd as if everybody, whoever rang the bell of a flat, would be regarded as a resident in it, just because he has walked before the door, or has tried to get into the flat.

Now it should be touched on, that the English language uses the noun *possession* – which came into the medieval English from the Latin, through the mediation of the Old French – for the expression of the ‘fact of possession, to owe or to control something’, and it has no negative connotation in that sense. But it also has such

a nuance of meaning which is fully compatible with the original (catholic) Latin meaning: “being under the control of a demon or a spirit”.¹ This latter meaning of the word has a prevailing role in the everyday language, opposed to the language of the vocabularies. It is not a coincidence, that when Craig E. Stephenson’s book, “Possession: Jung’s comparative anatomy of the Psyche” was published, one of the critics of the work put his opinion in the following words “*Possession: a word that seems to defy psychological containment and immediately drag in exorcists, Gothic literature, and horror films is a very deliberate choice here*” (Rowland 2009: 1). I’m not satisfied with the use of this word for the comparative science of religion and the phenomenology of religion, given the demon-centred and in such a way negative, aggressive connotation.² It is incomprehensible and scientifically unreasonable, that why has not a value-free expression been sought in the course of forming a comprehensive concept of the ethnology of religion? The researchers should have sought such a concept, which is not burdened by other shades of meaning, connected to religion. They should have taken Rudolf Otto as an example, a classic of the phenomenology of religion, who introduced the concept of “numinous”, to avoid the confusion resulting from the Christian connotations of the word “holy” (Otto 1920: 5–7).

Parallel scientific models

According to a dogma of the comparative science of religion, we would explore the phenomena of the different religions, the different religious manifestations in a truly scientific way only if we stand apart equal distance from every form of religion, if we investigate them in a common coordinate system. While this attractive, widely accepted, but scientifically not established standpoint rests on the idea of *cultural relativism*, it disregards the fact, that the equivalence of the different systems of reference was proved scientifically more than a century ago (See Lanczos 1974). It has been known for a long time, that for example the debate between the geocentric and the heliocentric worldview was a completely sterile one, because the world could be described scientifically in both system of reference. The idea of the „only true” system of reference, required by the comparative science of religion, is an unnecessary and scientifically unreasonable constraint of the research.

What is more, the canonized idea of this “neutral” observing position is usually accompanied by a – using the expression of Katherine Ewing – *reductive atheist* framework of interpretation (see Ewing 1994: 572). David J. Hufford pleaded not by

¹ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/English/possession> (Downloaded: 30. March, 2015.)

² This example also confirms the opinion of those researchers (e.g. Robert Segal, Hans Penner, and Donald Wiebe) who lacked on the part of the phenomenology of religion the methodological rigor, and objected the subjective, unscientific features of it. (See e.g. Segal 1983, 1994; Idinopoulos-Yonan 1994.)

chance for the rejection of methodological atheism or methodological agnosticism, regarding as one-sided and unjust to expect only from the religious researcher to suspend their conviction (Hufford 1995: 67–68). When Janice Boddy surveyed the scientific literature dealing with the phenomena of possession in 1994, she was concurring with some researchers (Comaroff 1985; Ong 1987; Kramer 1993; Taussig 1993), put it with a reason: *“that spirit possession rests on epistemic premises quite different from the infinitely differentiating rationalizing a reifying thrust of global materialism and its attendant scholarly traditions”* (Boddy 1994: 407). I found on the basis of the scientific literature – accessible in Hungarian libraries and digital repositories – that the situation hasn’t changed much in this regard since 1994: although the mainstream scientific approaches have many roots, fundamentally all publications are characterized by a materialist conception of the man and the world. They essentially exclude even the mere possibility that the man may be more than a pure biological being. They regard the so-called “possession” as some sort of the “psycho-biological” phenomenon, as a manifestation of a mental disease, practically it doesn’t even arise that it could be interpreted in any other way. And if someone dares to challenge this presupposition, as did Stafford Betty, the professor of the philosophy of religion in the California State University in his essay, published in 2005, about the increasing proofs of the demonic possession, then the experts don’t reflect on him, but – it seems – they kill him by the ‘conspiracy of science’ (Betty 2005).

Although there were previously psychiatrists who challenged the interpretation of the phenomena of demonic/divine possession which reduced it to mere psychosis, a landmark was in that field the book of *Simone Morabito*, “Psychiatrist in the hell. A scientific report”, firstly published in 1995, in Italian language (Morabito 2004). The excellent doctor of Bergamo viewed his patients with a biological-physiological approach, learned in the University, and he treated them with the customary psychiatric measures. He did so, until he met in his medical praxis shocking manifestations of possession, which couldn’t be classified into the normal symptoms of psychiatric illnesses, about which he learned. This experience changed his entire outlook. Since then he has systematically documented all that cases, where he found illnesses caused by demons. In the course of his work he was led by the attitude “I believe those things, about which I have experience”. As he remarked in his book “in the light of my credo, as a man of the science and conscience, I had many ways to observe the cases of demonic possession, by my refined medical methods. When these patients went through an exorcism, they found themselves in the state of total amnesia. They don’t remember their horrible crying, grotesque psychomotoric reactions, their prescience, visionary experiences and other supernatural phenomena” (Morabito 2004: 13–14.). Morabito emphasizes, that this state only rarely weakens the person’s intelligence and inner life. Apart from this, the people suffering from temporary possession are able to work in important positions or jobs with great responsibility, as politicians, lawyers or students, and they fulfil

their obligations in a professional way. However, in some cases they have experiences of grave torments, which have to be documented scientifically. At these moments it appears, that another person, with a horrifying nature acts in them. During the exorcism, it is a frequent experience, that the person ruled by an evil spirit, even if he/she is an aged one can jump as high as a young acrobat. The possessed person speaks in a language which he has never learnt, he shrieks blasphemy and curses, he laughs at other people and mocks them, and he is able to squeeze metal objects, as if they were cooked macaroni. Beyond this he can read in other people's thoughts and reveals the hidden secrets of those, who are present. The phenomena, mentioned by that professor of psychiatry, are the same as the criteria of demonic possession enumerated by the *Rituale Romanum*.³ Before somebody would attack the professional credibility of Simone Morabito I must remark immediately, that he was nominated for the medical Nobel prize too (Piotrowski 2008).

In the 2008 March issue of the *New Oxford Review* there was published the description of a case of demonic possession by Richard E. Gallagher, the eminent New York psychiatrist, a part of which was a levitation for 30 minutes (Gallagher 2008). Whatever way we think about this, that phenomena hasn't been registered as a symptom in any classification of the psychiatric illnesses. And the materialist approach can't offer any explanation for that. Why the law of gravitation didn't work in the case of the person in question for half an hour? The articles of Gallagher got sympathetic comments from several psychiatrists.⁴

In the light of these facts, perhaps it is not a surprise, that the most recent edition of the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the union of American psychiatrists (DSM-5), already recognizes not only the existence of the pathological, but also that of the non-pathological possession, too (Spiegel et alii 2013; Saville-Smith 2013; Sersch 2013: 11, 14–15). We could see, that the reality, or at least the possibility of the demonic possession is recognized by this time on the part of the science of psychiatry. The suppression, ignorance or negligence of this fact is an unworthy and unjustifiable attitude on the part of a researcher, and it is the violation of the fundamental scientific ethics, too. Thus, it is a scientifically indefensible treatment of the question, as if only the materialist view would be the only scientific interpretation of the phenomena of the possession.

It is a natural feature of the natural sciences, that there exist more models of interpretation for the explanation of some phenomena. The treatment of these doesn't mean any problem for the natural scientists. In my opinion, it is time to reconcile with the thought, that more than one scientific explanation could be formulated for the same phenomena, on the basis of different worldviews.

³ Essentially the same criteria are described by other Christian denominations too, see e.g.: Leering 1976; Mayes n. d.

⁴ See in the numero June 2008 of the *New Oxford Review* the reader's letters of Joseph T. English (Manhattan, New York) and Marx J. Albanese (Cambridge, Massachusetts).

For the philosophy of science, it has been obvious for a long time, that it is more appropriate to speak about scientific worldviews, in plural, and not about *the* scientific worldview. The worldview of the biology or that of the physics are different even within the natural science too, furthermore these worldviews also change from time to time, sometimes quite quickly, and several scientific world-models exist beside each other.⁵ As Peter Berger emphasized the world-view is a construction by multiple perspectives (Berger 2001: 17–98). The abstract and exclusive world-view, standing above all, which is still envisaged by some people, doesn't exist. Because the Christian doctrine constitutes a coherent *system of credibility* in the sense of Peter Berger, the scientific interpretation according to the Christian worldview has its own *raison d'être*. This is fundamentally different from the materialist world-view in that respect that 1.) it holds God and the angels and demons ontologically real entities and⁶ 2.) it regards the human being as not only a biological being, consisting of matter, but a creature possessing a non-material soul (*ruach, pneuma, spiritus*), who is able to enter into a relationship with God, just in virtue of this nature.⁷ Thus, according to this world-view the communication with God is not a kind of hallucination, not something a priori pathological, but a real possibility for the man. It would be a mistake to regard the Christian world-view as irrational, because of these features. In that system of reference, the interpretation of the different phenomena is possible in a fully rational, methodical, reasoned, scientific way, just as it is possible on the basis of a reductionist, atheist world outlook. We shouldn't forget

⁵ A survey of the changing worldviews of the different ages, cultures and sciences is offered by Marksches et alii 2011.

⁶ These transcendent entities are not equally important principles of the world: God is the Creator, the angels are creatures, whose created nature constitutes the ontological foundation of the choice between good and evil, and establishes its importance – see the distinction based on the latter between the good and the fallen angels (demons).

⁷ Man, as a created being does not have in itself (in its material reality) the cause and explanation of his/her existence, thus it is his/her elementary need to search for this cause beyond the created (material) world. In the light of this search the scientific research based on the Christian worldview does not condemn the non-Christian religious manifestations but rather it investigates, analyzes them. It is justified to quote as a support for this attitude on the part of the Catholic theology the following guiding doctrinal statement of the Church: “The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life or religion.” Another place of the *Nostra aetate* official declaration of the Second Vatican Council about the relation between the Church and the Non-Christian religions lies down unanimously: “From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of the things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the profound religious sense (...) The Church therefore, exhorts their sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men” http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_council_s/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatiii_decl_19651028_nostra_aetate_en.html (downloaded: 21. May 2017).

that the scientific thinking is the offspring of the scholastic theology. It should be remarked that the materialist worldview doesn't provide any guarantee for the adherence to these requirements: it is not the implicit or explicit worldview, but the followed methodology which makes some intellectual practice truly scientific. Of course, as the reductionist-atheist approach is not a homogenous one, neither the Christian interpretation is uniform, it may be plural too. It may build on some sort of Christian theology, but it may use some quite different argumentation.⁸ Such a Christian scientific paradigm does not mean the rejection of the methodological naturalism/materialism. It accepts, as the fundamental epistemological principle of the sciences that we should seek natural causal explanations of the phenomena, and these have to be tested by the methods of science – but it resolutely advocates the thesis, that methodological naturalism doesn't imply ontological naturalism.⁹ Quite a few of the practitioners of the science thinking in such a way, even if it seems, that the majority, build their outlook on the unprovable supposition that the world consists exclusively of matter. Some of them hardened this into a dogma, and exclude *ab ovo* from their system of interpretation the possibility of the transcendent. This attitude results in a philosophical tautology and makes impossible

⁸ It is a characteristic symptom of the visceral aversion (in some scientific quarters) against this outlook, that when I formulated my thoughts about the legitimacy of a scientific paradigm, based on the Christian worldview, in my keynote speech at the discussion meeting of the Folklore Section of the Hungarian Ethnographic Society (Magyar Néprajzi Társaság), three of the four discussants refused this hypothesis. The material of the published debate: see Szulovszky 2014a. The three refusing opinions: Klaniczay 2014; Pócs 2014; Vargyas 2014. The only affirmative comment is: Mohay 2014. My rather concise answer to the objections: Szulovszky 2014b. To avoid the misunderstandings or misinterpretations there are some further remarks are necessary. The Christian paradigm urged by me is not about the problem of „personal knowledge” (Polányi 1994) or about the relationship of the personal belief and science or about the possible connection between the „scholarly voice” and the „personal voice” (Hufford 1995). The further problem of the possible influence of the researcher's own worldview in the course of the investigation of religion becomes only indirectly a part of my project. The point is rather the applied *frame of reference*. Because the cultivation of the comparative science of religion or ethnology of religion on the bases of emic viewpoint, becomes more and more accepted, thus I emphasize: that my purpose is not the promotion of this approach. I speak about the Christian scientific worldview as a possible etic perspective, as a scientific interpretive framework, which has the same value as the materialist one.

⁹ *This appears at the critical, philosophically important points of interpretation*, as the nature of the so-called possession, for the Christian doesn't exclude the possibility of the Christian interpretation. This means a “surplus” option compared to the naturalist-materialist model of reality, thus – remaining at our example – the Christian interpretation may result in either: (1) Somebody is judged to be ‘possessed’ validly, or (2) on the contrary, somebody's “possessed” state is really a psychiatric problem, or (3) it may happen that *both* the demonic effect and the psychiatric illness are simultaneously responsible for somebody's symptoms. According to the experience of the exorcists the strong demonic influence lasting for a long time may cause a psychiatric illness in the course of time, and in that case the cooperation with a doctor is absolute necessity.

the full knowledge of the world, because the representatives of this attitude don't take into account some logically possible options. Furthermore, this materialist standpoint doesn't square with the consensus of the philosophers, that – because the fundamental question of the philosophy is undecidable – everybody is entitled to endorse either the naturalist or the transcendent ontological standpoint. Thus, if it follows the methodological canon of the science, both the naturalism and the supernaturalism may claim for itself the status of science.¹⁰ The truth of this claim is not challenged at all by the fact, that the current practice of the science doesn't reflect it. In many cases the distorted attitude of so-called *scientism* can be felt in science. This is a sort of naturalism/materialism, posing as science, which regards real only what is cognizable by the methods of natural science. According to the metaphor of Raniero Cantalamessa,¹¹ these scientists are like the birds of the night, who don't know anything about the world of the day. They judge a world, which they don't know.

The quality, the scientific value of an interpretation depends on the professional knowledge of a researcher, on the scientific, methodical approach and not on the worldview, on the chosen framework of interpretation. The credibility of a given research or the competence of the researcher is determined by the coherence, the logic and rationality of the explanations offered by their models – whether or not the scientist is a believer or a religious skeptic.

The types of the demonic effects

I believe that the phenomena of demonic possession can be understood completely when including it into a system of various demonic effects. These effects are not only directed at human beings, but also towards their environment. Occasionally, a harmful activity focuses on certain places, objects or animals, and the strange and unnatural phenomena associated with such activity has an indirect effect on man. These effects are aimed at harassing people living or working in the affected area. “Genius loci” is a common term which refers to “the spirit” of a place, the prevailing character and atmosphere of a certain area. It is an ancient experience that there are some localities people feel good – or on the contrary, particularly bad – about. In case of the latter, demonic infection can be a possible cause.

Such infection can happen in places where serious crimes (like murder or suicide) have been committed, or occult and other anti-God activities have been prac-

¹⁰ It should be remarked, that when we investigate according to a Christian scientific framework of interpretation, then our purpose is the cultivation of the humanities and not of the theology, thus it couldn't be our task to justify the theses of some religious system. And when we interpret various religions, religious phenomena according to the coordinates of some worldview or system of reference, this doesn't mean that we regard by all means only the given framework, applied by us, as the only possible and true one.

¹¹ Raniero Cantalamessa is an Italian Catholic priest and theologian, a member of the order of minor friars. He is the official Preacher of the Papal Household.

ticed in the past, allowing dark forces to take over. People living in a place like that usually feel that something always pulls them back when they want to take a leap forward, even if they personally do not allow the devil to enter into their own lives.

According to the well-known metaphor of St. Augustine the fallen angels are – since the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ – like the bonded snappers for the Christian man. They may hurt us, if we step into their scope because of sin, which is our revolt against God or because of occultism. According to the classic formulation of the theology: “Jesus Christ bound the Satan by His cross and resurrection, he took power above him, and he transmits this power to every Christian” (Gál 1996: 274). The deep sphere of the soul, where the free decisions are born, could not be approached by the demons; they may try to exert influence only through the psyche, the realm at the border of the body and the soul. Only grave sin places the human being totally under the power of Satan. If we were outside of the power of the sin, all other influence of Satan and the demons would extend exclusively on the body or/and the psyche.

Since the purpose of the demon is to gain a firm hold of a person and exercise full power over him, it is advisable to categorize the types of demonic effects based on the stages of this ambition. Accordingly, three main categories should be distinguished. Invoking Adolf Rodewyk’s metaphor of castle, these three groups can be described as follows:

1. The demon is still outside the castle walls. This condition is characterized by various demonic harassments (lat.: *vexatio*) which can be directed to the psyche (temptation, intimidation) but also to the human body as physical insults. At the same time, the demon has no specific influence or power over the human being, but actively tries to achieve it.
2. The walls of the castle has holes in some places. This counts as demonic influence (lat.: *influentia*), which can be either psychical or physical in nature. The demon already exercises some power over the person in question, but the human personality hasn’t been completely overshadowed yet. In this stage, the demon can have a strong influence in the psyche and it could limit the resistance and performance of the affected person. Moreover, in some cases it can cause physical fatigue, various symptoms and illness.

A common feature in these two previous cases is that “the castle” has not been taken entirely, which means that the demon does not have complete control over the affected person. Thus, the comprehensive term “siege” or “circumsessio” can be used to describe these categories. (The German professional literature uses the term “Umsessenheit”.)

3. The demon is inside the walls of the castle, and it has fundamental control over it. This stage can be described best with the term “obsession” (lat.: *obses-*

sio) (It is different from the psychiatric sense of the word.) The demon has so much power over the affected person, that it can overshadow the human personality. This demonic possession is based on a psychic nature, which means that the body of the affected person can be influenced through his psyche. Two main groups can be distinguished: a) *oppression* (lat. *oppressio*), when the personality of the affected person and the demon prevail alternately (attacks); b) *possession* (lat.: *possessio*), when the original personality of the affected person gets entirely overshadowed behind the demonic personality.

The different types of the demonic influence are surveyed by the table nr. 1.

Table 1. The types of demonic effects

DEMONIC EFFECTS									
Some elements of the human environment		Human					Human environmental space		
Indirect harassment <i>vexatio indirecta</i>		Siege <i>circumsessio</i>			Obsession <i>obsessio</i>		Infection <i>infestatio</i>		
Lifeless	Flora and fauna	Harrasment <i>vexatio</i>		Influence <i>influentia</i>					
Things	Structures	Flora	Fauna	Psychical harrasment	Physical harrasment	Physical influence	Psychical influence	Oppression <i>oppressio</i>	Possession <i>possessio</i>
The direction of the rising effect →									

The Church speaks about the state of possession, when the paranormal phenomena are manifested in bizarre and purposeless forms: unmovable “weight” of the body, or levitation, speaking in a language unknown for the person, and its understanding, ability to foresight and cognition of secrets.¹² This is generally accompanied by the aversion and fear of the holy objects and acts, like the sacraments, the holy water, the prayers and the Church.¹³ The possession may produce symptoms

¹² As it is witnessed both by legends of the saints and frequent examples in our days, part of these phenomena occur among those Christians too, who dedicated their life perfectly to God, and they are accompanied by the strengthened faith and belonging to the Church. McDonnell-Montague 1994; Suenens 1975: 136–158.

¹³ On the problem of the devil and the possession by the demons see the document: „Christian faith and demonology” prepared on behalf the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19750626-fedecristiana-demonologia-fr.html (downloaded: 2017. 21. february) See: Rodewyk 1963; Kasper-Lehmann 1978; Amorth 1996.

similar to the psychosis, diseases, fears, the degradation or “exchange” of personality, unwanted acts, the loss of the free will. These symptoms are expounded by the *Rituale Romanum*. See also: Amorth 1990; Amorth 1996). Thus, the Roman Catholic Church admonishes the exorcist to perform his task with great circumspection. According to the 1172 canon of the still valid Church Code “only a pious, learned, sober priest, with an irreproachable life” may get authority for this specific service. The *Rituale Romanum* summons with emphasis the exorcist “not to be convinced too easily about the possession by the evil spirit; thus, he should know well all the symptoms which distinguishes the possessed person from someone afflicted by some sort of psychic illness” (Amorth 1996). Hence, the priest – and possibly his helpers, need for the service of exorcism beyond the matured faith, theological expertise, and a serene, balanced personality a specific ability, the *discretion spirituum*, the charismatic gift of the distinguishing of the spirits (Floristan – Duquoc ed. 1979; Dubay 1997; Buob 2006). The Church also advises the priest as far as it is possible to resort to the help of a doctor or of a psychiatrist, having a sense of spiritual matters, (see Amorth 1990: 39). Before the bishop or the priest authorized by the bishop for this service would say in Latin the prayers of the *Rituale Romanum* prescribed for this case,¹⁴ a meticulous anamnesis takes place (Amorth 1990: 38), to explore in the life of the man, asking the intercession of the Church, presumably suffering from demonic influences, or in the life of his/her family those details, which made possible the influence of the evil spirit. Those experts, who deal with the matters of the exorcism not only on a speculative, theoretical level, know precisely, that there are such criteria, by the application of which it may be decided in the particular cases whether the given state may be explained by an illness or by demonic origin, or possibly by both of these causes. According to the experience of more decades of the exorcist of the Roman diocese – which is confirmed by other exorcists too – the mere reciting of the prayer of exorcism in Latin can be a diagnosis in itself. If the problem has demonic roots the usual manifestations doesn’t fail (Amorth 1990: 39). In the Hungarian practice known by me, there is a systemic exchange of experiences between the experts of the Church and the doctors (psychiatrists, neurologists). Although the demonic or psychiatric character of a given case may be recognized, sometimes it occurs, that both of the factors should be taken into account. Especially in the course of longer harassments by the demons, there may emerge psychic illnesses too. Because of the possibility of psychical traumas, a Hungarian exorcist priest known by me avoids – if it is possible – using the term “exorcism” expression before the concerned people. He mentions instead of this *benediction*, or says: “now we say the prayer of the Church for this purpose, and he also insists on the Latin text of the exorcisms, because these texts in most cases are not comprehensible for those who are present, and thus the words could not cause psychic injuries even by accident.”

¹⁴ The doctrinal principles for the exorcism and the prayers of the ritual of exorcism are published by: Amorth, 1996. The last canonical document – prepared in the spirit of the Vatican Council II. – was the liturgical prescription for exorcism: De exorcismus 1999. See also: Hauke 2006.

“Divine and demonic possession”?

The expression of the “*divine and demonic possession*” became widespread in the Anglo-Saxon literature (Caciola 2003: 54–55). Although in the light of the cultural relativism the use of this expression is quite understandable, yet it is debatable in any case. Éva Pócs posited unanimously: It usual to categorise them according to the nature of the spirits and the direction of the human-spirits relationship:

- a) the combative penetration and aggressive reign of spirits (these by nature “evil” demons);
- b) divine possession, when a deity enters the body as if it were a holy vessel, or protects the human being or controls him. This type of possession is often at the same time a mystic union, *unio mystica* (the two are partially overlapping categories) which is underscored by the representation of the deity by masks, dances, or the “imitation’ of the deity in the course of collective rites;
- c) *mediumship*, *mediumism*, when the human being as if s/he were a mediating vessel – transmits the will or message of the deity or the spirits to another individual or community, in the case of divination this takes place in response to people’s question (Pócs 2005: 85).

However, this categorizing is rather a merely theoretical one as it is acknowledged by Pócs herself: “All forms of possession are collectively called divine possession when a human comes under the control of a God or superior spirit and this control in contrast to the negative intent of demonic possession is positive in character: from the possessor’s point of view it is protective, instructive, teaching or revelatory. Let us note immediately that this is only so in theory; in practice – at times due the ambivalence of the possessing spirit, at times because of the uncertainty of the positive or negative attitude – it can often be difficult to categorise possession as either divine or demonic” (Pócs 2005: 124).

Anyone with “common sense” would be embarrassed if somebody in the name of scientific thinking would classify both the professional poisoners and the practising chemists into the same category of “murderers”, just because the members of both groups give poison to other people. I think that in the field of religious phenomena would be such a grave mistake to lump together the phenomena of diverse origin and character on the basis of “*becoming under the intelligence of some alien spirit*”.

The categorizing based on superficial similarities, which doesn’t take into account the difference in content, is incompatible with the scientific spirit. The totally different nature and consequences of the impacts of these psychic states go against this typology. This sort of procedure is unintelligible also because the scientific literature – and not only the theological works – has been emphasizing the difference for a long time between the psychological effects coming from God and the ones coming from de-

mons. As Jürg Zutt also pointed to the fact (Zutt 1972) in his fundamental essay, these two approaches are diverging sharply from each other from the point of view of psychology.¹⁵ That is, why the famous psychiatrist and professor of neurology¹⁶ used the concept of *possession* (*Besessenheit*) only for the demonic effects, and the expression of *fulfilled state* (*Erfülltheit*) for the effects of divine origin.

My observations are in concord with the distinction of Zutt. The data to be enumerated in the following chart make unequivocal the reasonableness of this distinction. I made the test of the comprehensive notion of “divine and demonic possession” in the Christian culture, by taking as starting point the concept of the *strongest* impact of both entities on the human being. I summed the result – based on thirteen different criteria – in the following chart:

Table Nr. 2. *The most intense supernatural effects*

<i>Source</i>	divine	demonic
<i>Result</i>	communio (communion)	possessio (possession)
<i>The direction of the effects of entity</i>	lifts the man to himself	robs the man of his dignity
<i>the role of human will in the establishing of it</i>	merely human will is not sufficient for it; the divine effect cannot be provoked	It can be provoked by the will of the man, but it can occur against the will of the individual too.
<i>The attitude of man</i>	he longs for it as a present, he would like to meet God	It occurs usually against the will of the man
<i>The possibility of the prevailing of the will</i>	The will of the individual has its own margin	loss of the freedom of the will, unintended acts
<i>The state if consciousness</i>	despite its possible “ecstasy” the man is conscious	loss of consciousness
<i>Memories on the event</i>	the man remembers what happened with him/her	the man doesn't remember what has happened (amnesy)
<i>Accompanying phenomena</i>	joy, liberation	diseasedness, fears
<i>The character of the memory</i>	the man experiences it as the fulfilment of liberty	similar to bondage, captivity
<i>The state after the experience</i>	catharsis	scorchedness, depression
<i>After-effect</i>	charismas, spiritual gifts	illnesses
<i>Attitude to sacrality</i>	spiritual zeal	aversion to sacred things
<i>Attitude to the Church</i>	the commitment of the individual to the Church is strengthened	drawing away from the Church

¹⁵ “Ich verstehe hier Erfülltheit und Besessenheit als unterscheidbare Steigerungen der Ergriffenheit. Erfülltheit ist Steigerung der Ergriffenheit durch das Liebenswerte, durch das Schönen, das Gute, das Wahre, das Göttliche. Solche Ergriffenheit kann zu Freude, Rausch und Ekstase führen. Besessenheit ist aber Steigerung der Ergriffenheit durch das Häßliche, das Böse, das Feindliche, das Falsche, das Teuflische. Solche Ergriffenheit führt zu Angst, Entsetzen und zum Erstarren.” Zutt 1972: 11.

¹⁶ On his work see: Schönknecht 1999.

The thoroughgoing analysis of this chart necessitates more precise statement. To classify under the same terminology the two entities, causing the state of bondage and respectively the state of freedom, merely on the basis of the fact of their psychological effects is a more than dubious procedure. It is clear that the two different effects couldn't be brought to a common denominator in the Christian culture, because their accompanying effects and the conditions of their emergence are totally opposed. The experience of the church and the mystics shows, that when God fills the human being who desire yearning for this, then this communion is experienced by the man as the fulfilment of the freedom. Contrary to this the demonic possession could be described by the concept of the captivity and the bondage. The different kinds of demonic influence don't fill the concerned people with joy and peace, they become suffering subjects of the demonic influence fundamentally against their will.

According to the general opinion of the scientific literature, the *trance* is a fundamental condition, a “psychobiological condition” of the experience of possession (see: Bourguignon 1973; Crapanzano 1987: 14; Pócs 2001: 120, Pócs 2005: 84), but this is not valid for the forceful experiencing of God by the Christians. In the religious life of the contemporary mystics and of the Pentecostal charismatic movement, the Christian mystical experience – even if sometimes it can be accompanied by some strong physical effects – it doesn't go with ***the loss of consciousness or a modified state of mind***. The concerned man – opposed to that, who suffered by the demons – remembers exactly what happened with him. This was clearly expounded already by St. Therese of Avila (1515–1582). In the language of her own age, with a different terminology than ours, she admonished carefully against the “meditation” achieved by human efforts, the experiences through auto-hypnosis or other ways (see Ahlgren 2005; Billy 2007) It can be definitely stated: the fourth and fifth set of rooms of the “Interior Castle” – where Therese places the prayer of the mystical contemplation – couldn't be opened with a “master-key”. The so-called “contemplation infused into the soul” is a free gift of God. You can be longing for that but it couldn't be enforced.¹⁷ And this state – or, as it is formulated by a contemporary, practising mystic, this “movie” from God¹⁸ – doesn't go with the “knock-

¹⁷ „Its characteristic, indeed its most characteristic feature is, that the man himself doesn't induce it himself, but rather comes upon the man, in a quite unexpected way (...) As the most precious articles of trade have their valueless copies, as there is false gold, false diamond and false pearl, thus the prayer of rapture, and the supernatural contemplation also have a not rare false copy: the autohypnosis. The history of the Church speaks a lot about it. This was practised by the hesychasts of the mount Athos, the navel-gazers, who in solitary contemplation viewed the centre of their body, until some sort of pleasant stupor overcame their personality. This is a widespread practice in the Far East too, and I also have heard a lot about it in Japan. Our Mother St. Therese also mentions this repeatedly, and sometimes she had to take vigorous means to disenchant the souls fallen into such errors. For they were solemnly and sincerely convinced that they had genuine divine raptures.” (Szeghy 1990: 81, 86–87).

¹⁸ My own collection.

off” of the reason. As the theologian Gábor Kovács emphasizes: “*The prayer of collectedness*” in other words the “*vested contemplation, or by a less precise expression the “natural contemplation”, about which Therese teaches, is far from ...the ‘resting’ of the discursive thinking. It slows down, it became more quiet but it is not bound. The logic doesn’t stop working, we don’t get into a changed state of mind, the control of the reason doesn’t stop*” (Kovács 2006: 73).

Consequently, there is no role in the Christian mysticism for some “psychobiological condition”, as some sort of basic requirement. For the recognition of this one shouldn’t even accept the thought of the legitimacy of the Christian interpretative framework, it is sufficient to only cognize the characteristics of the explored phenomena. Let us summarize all that has been said! The applicability of the widespread general category of “divine and demonic possession” in the phenomenology of religion is not verified by the thoroughgoing analysis implemented of a limited set of religious phenomena: the religious experiences in the Christian culture. The peculiarities of the two effects of different origin, their consequences for the human being are fundamentally opposite to each other. When, in the field of science the scholars tried to look on a lesser, limited subset, to verify a statement formulated for the whole set and it hasn’t been confirmed, then they are ready to draw the proper consequences. I think that the folklorists, ethnologists of religion and the specialists of the comparative science of religion should be confronted by the fact, that they applied without much reservation the concept of “divine and demonic possession”. By this time, it turned out about this notion, that it couldn’t be used as an universal category of the phenomenology of religion.

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